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FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

THE LITTLE WHITE ROOM

BY

MARC · EDMUND · JONES ·

"THE STOLEN YEAR," An Odd Story, Coming In Our Next Number.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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THE LITTLE WHITE ROOM

By MARC EDMUND JONES

PROLOGUE

WITH the skilled ease of long practice the butler brought the dessert from the sideboard; sparkling silver dishes in which trembled invitingly four large portions of an amber-colored wine jelly floating in a rich and thick yellow cream. The older of two men at the table, in the chair at the head, gazed intently at the gelatin concoction before him, but it was plain that his thoughts were elsewhere. Finally he pushed the dish away, and rose. In the light, diffused through the heavy leaded glass canopy hung over the table, he was very erect and distinguished. He was immaculately dressed in dinner coat, and there was a somber poise in his expression.

"I do not think I care for any dessert," he remarked. "If you will excuse me——"

The others nodded and he turned, passing noiselessly over the soft carpet of the dining-room, and disappearing into a hallway which was luxuriously furnished and lighted brilliantly.

For several moments the other man toyed uncertainly with the contents of his dish. He was little more than a boy, yet he was perfectly at home in his Tuxedo, and in his face were the beginnings of mature lines of determination. Finally he rose also and asked to be excused.

Instantly the two women exchanged glances.

"Frank!" In the voice of the senior was command, and the suggestion of habitual asperity. "Are you going to quarrel with your father again to-night, Frank?"

He hesitated, but did not answer. After a moment he turned, hurrying from the room. There was a flash of his feet as he ran up the stairs,

passing rapidly through the triangular section of steps visible from the dining table; then all was silent.

The older woman, with a gesture of resignation, turned to the dish before her, and ate its contents quickly and with evident relish. Then she motioned to the butler, directing that the coffee be served.

The fourth occupant of a place at dinner was a girl, dressed simply in white and with only a modest little square of neck to yield deference to the demands of a formal meal. Uneasy, almost frightened, she glanced sharply towards the hall at momentary intervals. Her hair was coiled up, but there were little stray curls just at her throat, and each such nervous turning tossed them about attractively.

Perhaps two full minutes elapsed from the time the boy left the dining table to follow his father up the stairs. In that interval the butler blew out the alcohol lamp beneath the percolator on the serving table, and set out two tiny cups upon a tray. Otherwise there was neither sound nor appreciable movement beneath the heavily beamed ceiling of the old-fashioned room.

Suddenly a piercing shriek, the voice of a man in mortal fear or overwhelming agony, sounded from above. Almost before the cry had echoed from the walls below the girl was on her feet, racing towards the hall and the steps. The woman followed, and together they mounted the stairs, breathlessly.

In the upper corridor they ran, without question, towards the rear. Through an opened door was to be seen a little white room, a nursery complete with every object needed for the pleasure or comfort of any lucky infant there domiciled. There was no baby, however. Instead, square in the middle of the floor, lying in a pool of his own blood, was the older of the two men. Bending over him, grasping a cane with its heavy handle smeared red, was the boy. He saw the two women and jumped to his feet. Eyes wide, he dashed towards them, brandishing his weapon.

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTERRUPTED VACATION

DETECTIVE ZANDER of Headquarters, assigned to the homicide squad, stood in the waiting room of the Weehawken Ferry at the foot of Cortlandt street. With one hand he clutched the handle of an obviously new walrus traveling bag; with the other he swept from his head a battered black felt hat, and in the same gesture mopped his brow impatiently. This was the beginning of Arthur Zander's first vacation in nearly four years. A few moments would find the boat warping into the slip; then he would be borne up the Hudson past nearly three miles of New York City skyline; finally a West Shore train would carry him towards the Catskills, his destination and a trip upon which he long had set his heart.

There was a slight afternoon haze upon the river, and the sun was diffused warmly over the various hurrying craft. Tiny motor boats and heavy, powerful tugs moved on the water. A Sound steamer, with its huge paddle-wheels, cut off the prow of an outbound ocean liner. Almost subconsciously the detective straightened. This at least was the first promise of a great out-of-doors and a world of play, for all that his view was bounded by the high spiles of the ferry slip and the low-lying roof of the dock house. There was a tang of the sea in the air, welcome after the reek of the city's slums and tenements. The blast of the signals of the harbor craft, as whistle answered whistle, already took him away from the bustle and clamor of narrow, little-known streets and low and dangerous dives and resorts; scenes of the work in which he had made an enviable reputation for himself. Yes, it was good to get away! It was a relief to think of an open sky and broad green hills where men did not rob, and steal, and kill; where human beings did not lie, and cheat, and prey upon each other.

Almost before he realized it the big ferryboat swerved confidently into the slip, and slowed in its course with a vigorous churning of water. At the same instant a voice sounded behind him.

"Zander! Thank heaven I caught ye!"

With a sinking sensation the detective turned, recognizing the broad Irish countenance of Paddy MacGinnis, a patrolman detailed at Headquarters.

"Well?" he demanded, somewhat sharply. "I'm off on my vacation, you know, Paddy. My ticket's bought, and this is my ferry coming in."

The Irishman, a large man, was blowing still from the exertion of his chase. "It's hurry back you must, anyway. It—it's a big case and—and the Inspector said——"

"But don't you understand? This is my first vacation in four——"

"The Inspector said to tell you Grant Wellston's been murdered brutally. There—there is no clue yet, at all."

"Oh!" The detective sobered abruptly. "Why didn't you say that in the first place?"

Without another word he regrasped his bag, pulled his hat down over his face viciously, and led the way out of the ferry house.

Grant Wellston! The Wellstons had been preeminently concerned in the development of New York City. Old Rufus Wellston, the founder of the family fortunes, a simple truck farmer in a then outlying section of Manhattan Island, had established the first stage line on Broadway, and in his lifetime had taken part in the promotion and building of the first steam railroad in the lower part of the State. His sons and grandsons after him had been prominently identified with

every sort of traction interest and public utility within the municipality. A Wellston had endowed the Wellston library, afterwards merged into the city public library. A Wellston hospital still fronts on a Wellston Square in a section of the city now inhabited by foreign immigrants, but once known as the very center of aristocracy.

Grant Wellston was the black sheep of the family. As a youth he had been involved in scrape after scrape, and his escapades had been almost a daily feature in the society columns. Twice sent abroad to allow some affair to blow over, he had returned each time to find fresh trouble to bring upon the family name and reputation. Finally he met and fell desperately in love with Gladys Vandeventer. For a while he seemed a different individual. The Newport set breathed a deep breath of relief.

His marriage to Gladys Vandeventer took place in Saint Thomas's church with great pomp and ceremony. The old Wellston home on Fifth Avenue was opened once more, and it became a place of constant gaiety and entertainment. Then Grant built his bride a home on the old Wellston lands at the tip of Spuyten Duyvil, facing Inwood Hill and overlooking both the Hudson and Harlem rivers. Here their first child was born to them, a boy. Less than a year afterwards a girl followed. But for the interference of the Vandeventers the happiness of the couple might never have been disturbed.

Gladys' people, however, demanded her presence in city social functions almost constantly, and it was inevitable that she would begin to neglect her children to some extent, and equally inevitable that Grant, forced back into the world of his temptation, would again involve himself in some disgraceful episode. The details of the scandal never became public. His wife obtained a legal separation and the custody of the little ones. He went abroad once more, and for a dozen years dropped completely from sight.

At the end of the period he returned and, to the surprise of his social set, effected a reconciliation with his wife. She returned to the home in Spuyten Duyvil, and to the seclusion of her happiness. Within a year the third child came, but at the sacrifice of the mother's life. A weakling at birth, the infant survived her less than six months. Then, so quickly that all his relatives and friends were aghast, Grant Wellston remarried. From that moment the door of no New York home was ever open to him.

It was never stated openly that Clara Bray Wellston, the new mistress of the home facing Inwood Hill, had been the woman responsible for the first trouble between Grant Wellston and his wife, but such was the general belief. Even their neighbors in Spuyten Duyvil thought the haste of the marriage indecent. In society circles the obscurity and mystery of the woman's origin was principally responsible for the fact that she was never received. Other than that as Clara Bray, a widow, she had dwelt quietly at a downtown hotel for more than fifteen years, nothing was known about her.

Detective Zander realized that as the murdered man was a Wellston, it would give prominence to the case, and make it necessary for the city's detective force to do its very best. He was fully aware of the large element of mystery in the life of Grant Wellston, which served to complicate the investigation. His willingness to give up his vacation without protest, however, was due to another consideration altogether. Years before an uncle of his by marriage had been butler at the Spuyten Duyvil mansion of the Wellstons. When he had come to New York City as a very small boy, Grant Wellston had used his influence to get the youngster a position in one of the municipal departments as a messenger. This the detective had never forgotten. To bring the murderer of his benefactor to justice was little enough to do in discharge of his debt.

"Zander!" The chief of the detective bureau was a large florid man inclined to loud talk and to a gruff manner which served as a mask for a very soft interior. "This case is meat for the press, and there's going to be a lot of fuss and smoke. But no one has tipped off the papers yet, and there's a city taxi waiting for you. If you hurry you can be on the ground and at work before any one gets there to disturb you. I want to put the case entirely in your hands. We'll keep it quiet as long as we can."

"What do you know, chief?"

"Nothing except that the man was badly butchered, and that no one saw anything."

"Then——"

"It's in your hands, Zander! Don't stop for questions! Do as well as you did on the Smithwick case, and make it fast."

On the long ride out through the center of town, the detective recalled to mind the few facts he remembered of Grant Wellston's family.

Grant Wellston had many enemies and there had been much of mystery in his life. If his murder were the result of personal animosity or for the purpose of personal gain, then a high degree of detective skill would be required. Motives would have to be analyzed. Possible suspects would have to be listed and watched very quietly. Unquestionably in such a case the crime would prove to have been committed by some one without a criminal record. None of the ordinary police methods would be of any avail.

Arthur Zander felt the thrill known to the huntsman on the chase as his little car sped along Washington Heights, bringing him ever closer to his destination. He was a young man, still within his late twenties, thoroughly wrapped up in his work. To him nothing was so fascinating as the tracing out of some devious trail left by some human beast of prey, nothing so satisfactory as being personally responsible for the punishment of some moral outcast. On a case his

eyes would sparkle from the very keenness of his glance, and his face would light with that unusual determination which lay at the bottom of his long record of successes. At such times he was strikingly handsome, and more than one pretty girl had felt her eyes soften as she glanced at him. But Arthur as yet had proven himself quite woman-proof.

He looked at his watch. Seven-ten! He had missed supper, but that was a small matter. Now his taxi was speeding down the incline on Broadway toward Dyckman Street, below the nose of Fort George. Already darkness was descending rapidly. The huge Edison sign at the Harlem river plant was lighted, as were the cars in a subway train on the elevated structure a block to the east of him. The chauffeur switched on his lamps and drove straight ahead, crossing Kingsbridge into Bronx borough, then swerving sharply to the west. Before him was the high shoulder of land known as Spuyten Duyvil, barely looming up now in the dusk. The ascent had to be made in low gear, then there was another sharp turn back Manhattanwards on the crest of the hill. At this moment the car rolled to a stop. Arthur leaned out impatiently.

After a moment of playing with the self-starter and his levers, the chauffeur jumped out to investigate. He examined his carbureter, then lifted his seat for a glance at the gasoline tank.

"Out of gas!" he exclaimed, in deep chagrin.

"How far is the Wellston place?" Arthur asked.

"Only about half a mile, straight ahead."

"Guess I'll walk it."

"It's the last house on the left, fine big lawns on all sides—you can't miss it."

Now it was dark. There were scattered lights on the road, which was oiled macadam without sidewalks. On either side was dense foliage and only occasionally, as he hurried along, could Arthur catch glimpses of the houses, all of which were set well back in spacious grounds. It was hard to believe that this was New York City. It did not even give him the impression of a metropolitan park. Rather he might easily have imagined that he was making his way upon some rural road in an outlying county.

There were no tangible signs of life. No automobiles passed him and there were no people upon foot. In all probability, he thought, the news of the murder had not yet been carried to the people of the neighboring homes. Certainly no signs of excitement were evident.

Gradually he was able to pick out his destination in the gloom. Through the trees beyond was a glimpse of the Hudson and a dark outline which he grasped was Inwood Hill, across Spuyten Duyvil creek. He paused.

Every window in the Wellston home was lighted, but there was no other indication of the tragedy. Should he steal about first, on the chance of stumbling upon some clue before his presence was suspected, or should he announce himself, and study the scene of the crime?

While he hesitated he was aware suddenly of a rush of skirts. Straight towards him came the figure of a girl, seeming very small as she loomed up out of the darkness. He could only tell that she was hatless and was breathing heavily.

"Are you the detective from police headquarters?" she gasped.

"Why?" He wondered whether to seize her and question her. Obviously she was interested in the case in some way. "I am from headquarters," he added.

Without warning she flung both arms about his neck, hysterically. He felt the slim roundness of her as she clung to him, caught—it was a ridiculously unimportant thing in view of the pressing work before him—the perfume of her hair when she held her face up close to his as though straining to study his expression.

"Save my brother!" she pleaded. Her clasp of him tightened, convulsively. "Tell me you won't let them arrest my brother. They say he killed father, but he didn't—he—he just couldn't!"

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITTLE WHITE ROOM.

GENTLY, but with firm strength, he disengaged her arms from his neck. Yet in spite of himself he was conscious of a very delicious thrill at her nearness in the darkness.

"You are Madge Wellston?" he asked.

"Y-yes!" She was trembling now. "You—you will——"

In the flash of an instant a picture came back to him. All at once he remembered this house and this road. He had been quite a little fellow, and his uncle, resplendent in a gorgeous butler's uniform, had brought him from the local New York Central station in one of the glistening Wellston carriages. He had been taken in to meet Grant Wellston, and in the spacious library there had been the figures of two children, a boy not much smaller than himself and a tiny girl with very wonderful curls. Of her own accord the latter little person had come up and put her hand in his.

"I'm Madge Wellston," she had said. "I like you!"

Then her father had ordered her away, laughing.

Now she was grown and was——

Suddenly Arthur Zander remembered himself. He was softening in the very course of duty. Was he so worn out that he was becoming sentimental? Was that the result of his overstrain for four long years?

He took her arm almost roughly. His voice was harsh as he sought to put all personal consideration from his mind.

"I can't make any promises, Miss Wellston! Come on into the house. I want to see the body and study the scene of the crime."

It seemed to him now that she sought to draw away from him. He caught a sharp intake of her breath, as though from fear. But he kept a tight clasp upon her arm, and together they entered the house.

Just inside the door was a patrolman from one of the outlying Bronx stations.

"You're the man from headquarters?" he asked.

"Detective Zander," Arthur replied. "Where's the body?"

"Upstairs in the little white room. The sergeant's upstairs, too, waiting for the medical examiner.

"How many of you are there?"

"Three besides the sergeant."

With dainty fingers the girl sought to loosen his clasp upon her arm.

"Please," she begged. "I won't run away."

He faced her, and in the light of the hallway had his first real glimpse of her. She was not as small as he had thought her to be in the grounds, but was very slender and erect and in her simple white dinner dress of some washable material was distinctly pretty. Her hair was up, but somehow it failed to take away the impression of girlishness. Her eyes, blue black, were very large as they met his. Again he sensed a distinct thrill, and he was uncomfortable. Why should she have this power to soften him. Again gruff, to conceal his own feelings, he released her.

"Don't leave the house," he directed.

He started for the stairs, hurrying now, and realizing that he had wasted several valuable moments.

"Shall I show you the way?"

She was right behind him, and without waiting for his answer brushed by and preceded him up the stairs. To his own disgust he caught himself noticing her trimness of ankle, the lithe, easy movements of her body; then the full gruesomeness of the murder took his interest and banished all thoughts of her, of everything but his work at hand.

The little white room proved to be a nursery, a chamber with a corner window bay and a total of five large windows facing east and south so that it would be flooded with sunshine at any hour of the day. The woodwork and furniture were immaculately white. The wall paper was light, covered with familiar nursery and Mother Goose characters. There were toys about, and a little bed made up with snowy linen all ready for some tiny occupant. On the floor, in the very center of the room, was the figure of the murdered man.

The policeman who had been on duty at the door drew back a sheet which had been thrown over Wellston.

"Nothing has been disturbed," he explained. "That's what they told us when we got here."

Arthur repressed a start with difficulty. Evidently a heavy handled cane lying at the side of the victim had been the weapon used to kill him. The whole side of Grant Wellston's head had been crushed in as though with a single blow, and he lay in a pool of congealed blood, a distorted expression of fear and surprise still evident in his features. More horrible still was a matted indenture in his chest, as though a second blow, vicious and purposeless, had been struck there also with the heavy end of the walking-stick.

With a sudden thought Arthur wheeled. In the door was the girl, eyes wide in fear. Fortunately the policeman had so held the sheet that she had caught no glimpse of the body.

"They—they wouldn't let me see him," she murmured, advancing into the room somewhat uncertainly.

For the first time he spoke to her kindly.

"It is very terrible. It would be better not to have this picture of him in your mind." Putting a hand upon each shoulder, he turned her about. "Where is your brother?"

She led the way down the hall, and as they approached a room at the further end Arthur caught the sound of voices. He paused in the doorway, and for a moment was not observed.

Before him were gathered, with the exception of the girl, all those who had been in the house. Frank, the son of the murdered man, was seated directly in front of the police sergeant, who was questioning him. While nearly the age of the headquarters detective, there was yet something boyish about young Wellston. On his face were tear marks, although now he answered the policeman calmly, protesting his innocence with sullen determination. His hands moved constantly, betraying his inner turmoil, but otherwise he gave no sign of weakening.

There were four servants huddled together in the corner. The cook, stout and colorless, sought to comfort a little upstairs maid who was on the verge of hysterics. The butler seemed more frightened than horrified. The gardener, a stoop-shouldered man well past middle age, was red and flushed with anger. He made no effort to conceal either his hostility towards the police or his faith in the young master they sought to accuse of the crime.

Standing at the side of the sergeant was the mistress of the house, the second Mrs. Wellston. She was the first to see the two in the doorway.

"Madge!" she screamed, coloring suddenly. "Didn't you hear the police officer say that no one was to leave this room? Where—where have you been?" Without waiting for an answer she faced her stepson. "Is this your doing, Frank? Did you send her out to remove some trace of your guilt? Are you trying to drag her into this, too?"

"By God——!" The boy leaped to his feet, livid with rage.

"Easy!" The police sergeant pulled Frank back, then turned and recognized Arthur. "Thank

heaven, Zander!" he muttered. "I'm glad they sent you out. Get into this. It's a mess."

"Who—who are you?" Mrs. Wellston glanced about quickly. Her tone was sharp.

Arthur studied her curiously. She was beautifully dressed in an evening gown which left neck and arms entirely bare and revealed her as remarkably well preserved for years which at the least must have numbered forty. Both hair and hands betrayed the touch of the beauty parlor. There was an overabundance of jewelry upon her from diamond pendants at her ears to a striking pearl pin of oriental workmanship at her breast. In her face, however, through the coating of rouge and powder were hard lines of ill temper and unhappiness, and now, under the strain of the death of her husband, the lower lids of her eyes drooped, red-edged, only too plainly a sign of life-long self-indulgence.

"I am Detective Zander, of headquarters," Arthur answered, finally.

"Oh!" Her gaze shifted for a moment, lamely, to Madge, still standing at his side. Obviously she wondered just how far he might have questioned the girl. Then she drew herself up. "I am very determined that the guilty person in this affair be punished." Her gaze now traveled to Frank, but he did not look up. "No matter who is responsible, he must pay the penalty. I insist that justice be done. In fact"—she glared at Arthur rather defiantly—"I have already sent for the best private detective in New York City. I have offered him any amount if he will see that justice is done."

Arthur met her glance calmly.

"Who is this man?"

"Carter Baron, of the Carter Baron Agency!"

"I remember him." Arthur smiled very slightly, in reminiscence. Baron, like himself, was a young man, but as pompous and overbearing as this widow of Grant Wellston seemed inclined to be. "We crossed swords, so to speak, in the Smithwick case."

"He's a good detective, isn't he? aggressively.

"In the Smithwick case he happened to be wrong, and I happened to be right, Mrs. Wellston."

"Well"—she showed her disbelief—"he had the very highest references, and I have a great deal of confidence in him. He will be here any moment, and I insist that he have every co-operation and that you policemen do not hamper him in any way. It is very important that justice——"

"See here, Mrs. Wellston!" Very suddenly Arthur lost his temper. "The New York City police are just as anxious to bring about the ends of justice as any private individual in the city. In fact"—he faced her, purposely rude, hoping to discourage her interference—"more anxious than some people I have met in my time as a police detective."

The effect of the chance remark upon her was ghastly. She went white, and for a moment her lower lip hung and trembled in ludicrous fashion. It might have been fear, or hurt pride, or anger too deep for expression. Whatever her feelings were, she turned away.

Arthur went to the side of the sergeant.

"What have you learned?"

"Well"—a glance about—"I've questioned the servants and the widow and both the young man and his sister. It looks bad for him."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, he's been quarreling with his father a lot lately, and——"

"What about?"

"He won't tell, and no one else knows."

"Go on!"

"To-night they were all four at supper as usual. The butler was waiting on them at table, and the maid and gardener were eating with the cook in the kitchen. When they came to the dessert Mr. Wellston said as how he didn't want any, and after a little bit he excused himself and went upstairs. The others, so the butler swears, remained at the table for a bit, and then Mr. Frank got up and excused himself. His stepmother asked him sharply if he was going to quarrel with his father again, but he did not answer her and went on up, too. Pretty soon there was a loud cry from above. Both Mrs. Wellston and Miss Madge were still at the table and they rushed up with the butler——"

"Who cried out?"

"Frank, my brother!" The girl hastened to answer this.

"Madge!" There was hidden menace in the voice of the elder woman. Then she faced Arthur with a smile. "It is hard to identify a cry like that. It was very shrill. But I am sure it was from the throat of my husband. I think he cried out when he saw Frank——"

"Please, Mrs. Wellston!" Arthur flushed again. "I'll ask you what I want to know." He turned to the sergeant once more. "Go on!"

"They found Mr. Wellston on the floor dead, his son bending over him. When the butler and the two women arrived Mr. Frank jumped up and ran towards them at the door excitedly. He said he didn't wish either of the ladies to see the body, but his stepmother swears he had the cane in his hand and that he tried first to attack them and then sought to get the cane out of the way. It was his, you see, and it was used to kill the father, and so was important evidence."

Arthur turned to Frank.

"What have you to say about the cane?"

"I didn't realize I had it in my hand. It—it all was so terrible."

"Tell me just what happened after you left the table."

"I went up to talk to my father about a matter we had been discussing."

"What matter?"

The younger Wellston straightened. With the fire of defiance in his face he was distinctly handsome. Whether for encouragement or because they shared the knowledge, his glance sought that of his sister.

"Now that my father is dead," he replied, "I cannot tell any one."

"If you take that attitude"—this was the sergeant—"it may result in your conviction for this crime, of which you say you are innocent."

"I cannot help it."

"Go on with your story," directed Arthur.

"I went up to talk to father, and as I hurried down towards the little white room I heard the sound of a sharp blow, like some one hitting at a wall and breaking through, and then there was a faint groan, and another blow, a dull one. I ran down the hall——"

"You expected to find your father in the nursery?"

"Yes, he always went there for a little while every evening. It—it was always kept just as it had been when his third child was alive, the—the baby which cost my mother her life, and which—and which didn't live."

"Go on!"

"I ran into the room and found my father on the floor. In the window I caught just a glimpse of the figure of a man about to climb out. One glance had shown me that my father was beyond any help I could give him and I rushed for the window. I couldn't see who it was, nor get any real look at the man because he threw the cane at me and leaped. I dodged and hurried after him, but just caught the faintest shadow of him as he darted into the bushes behind the house. Then I guess I don't know what I did. If I screamed or called out, I don't remember. I have no recollection of picking up the cane. That—that's all."

"You tried to keep your sister and stepmother from entering."

"When I saw Madge, I knew I didn't want her to have the horrilbe last picture of my father which I will always have now. I rushed to stop her half unconsciously, but I remember the impulse."

Arthur turned to the police sergeant.

"Did you verify his story of some one leaping out the window? Did you look for tracks in the lawn, or by the house? There may be a garden bed, you know——"

"Gosh!" The policeman was chagrined. "I never thought of that!"

"Hold every one here," Arthur ordered. "That's a vital point. It—it means everything in the case."

As he hastened towards the door he was aware of an appealing glance from Madge. He sensed that it was not so much an expression of fear as a sort of message of her confidence in him now. Once again a thrill went through and through him and it was with difficulty that he held his mind to his task.

He made his way around the outside of the house eagerly. He drew the pocket flashlight he had had the presence of mind to restore to its usual place in his pocket when he left headquarters. Under the bay windows of the nursery, unmistakable from the lawn, he saw the outlines of a flower bed and flashed his light. There, plainly imprinted, were the deep and very plain marks of two male shoes. So far Frank Wellston's story had been corroborated. He straightened. Because of little Madge he felt a keen sense of elation. Now to measure the prints.

Suddenly he was aware of the near presence of some living thing in the darkness close at hand. He reached towards his hip pocket. As he did so a gruff voice broke the stillness.

"Not a move or I shoot! Drop that flashlight and put up your hands!"

For the moment there seemed to be no course for Arthur but to obey. Raising his hands slowly, his mind actively sought for some means to turn the tables upon this unknown antagonist.

In another instant a bright flashlight, much stronger than his own, was directed square into his face, blinding him.

"Keep your eyes open," warned the other. "That's right! Now stamp around a bit with your feet and I'll let you go."

Arthur moved his feet obediently. He had no desire to die for refusing. Then he realized that he had destroyed the two footmarks he had planned to measure. No record of them would remain but his own unsupported evidence to the fact that he had found them.

"All right!" There was just the hint of pleasure in the voice in the darkness. "I'm going, and don't you attempt to follow."

With a click the electric glare disappeared. Glancing about quickly, Arthur discovered that his sight, indeed, had been taken away from him for several minutes, or until the pupils of his eyes could recover from the blinding illumination which had been directed into them.

CHAPTER THREE

DETECTIVE CARTER BARON.

As soon as he was able to distinguish the vague outlines of objects in the darkness, Arthur drew his weapon, and made an attempt to follow his unexpected antagonist. But it required only a very few moments for him to realize that such a task was not only hopeless, but was a waste of very valuable time. He turned back into the house, therefore, and hurried to the room upstairs.

"Did you"—Madge was the first to speak up—"did you find anything?"

Arthur hesitated. There was no reason why he should tell of his experience. "There were footprints in the flower bed," he replied. "There is little doubt but that some one leaped out the window because they were very deep."

Mrs. Wellston frowned, somewhat puzzled and unquestionably displeased at this evidence in support of her stepson's story. All at once she laughed harshly.

"It is preposterous!" she exclaimed. "My husband had no enemies, and I don't propose that justice shall be cheated by a pair of footprints in the garden." She wheeled upon Arthur almost viciously. "Don't you understand that my husband was only upstairs two or three actual minutes at the most? Will you tell me how an intruder could know that he would come upstairs and would go to the—to the little white room? Can you explain how an unknown murderer came into possession of Frank's cane?" She faced the boy again. "I believe you knew those footprints were there or perhaps you made them yourself, and now you use them to bolster up your wholly impossible explanations. Officer!" She confronted the sergeant. "I insist that my stepson be arrested at once. I charge him with the murder of my husband."

Arthur straightened, angry once more.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Wellston. This investigation is in my hands, and I assure you that I will take whatever action is necessary to punish the perpetrator of this crime."

"You don't believe that my stepson is guilty?"

"Not at present."

"Then——"

"I don't believe that any particular person is guilty—yet! Until I have examined into the circumstances, and until the medical examiner has arrived and made his investigation—until then I shall form no opinion."

With a sudden release of breath not unlike the snort of a baffled animal, the older woman swept around and stalked towards the door. There the policeman on duty stopped her with a muttered reminder that no one was to leave the room until given permission.

Madge flashed Arthur a grateful glance, but he had turned to Frank.

"When did you have your cane last, Wellston? You admit it is your property, I understand."

"It is my cane." Frank's voice was listless. "It disappeared about a week ago. I thought it was stolen."

"Did you speak to any one about its loss?"

"John, the butler. I asked him to search for it."

Arthur looked at the butler, who nodded in confirmation.

"It is as he says, sir."

"You couldn't find it?"

"No, sir. And I searched high and low, sir."

Arthur confronted the boy once more. "You stated that your father always spent a little time in the nursery after supper. Was it a regular habit with him? By that I mean did he invariably go there directly after his dinner every day, or just now and then as the mood struck him?"

"Every evening."

"How long has he been doing that?"

"As a regular thing about a month; but before he always spent some time in the room."

"I noticed that the little bed was made up with clean linen."

"It was his order that the room be kept just as though the baby hadn't died. It—the death was a hard blow to him, and the nursery served"—almost against his will the boy's eyes traveled around to his stepmother, narrowing very slightly—"served somehow to soften his loss, if you can understand."

Arthur smiled faintly.

"I can understand. Now"—coaxingly—"if I can persuade you to tell me the cause of the quarrel between your father and yourself——"

Frank shook his head determinedly.

"Well, how long had you and he been in disagreement?"

"About a mon——" Checking himself, Frank flushed. Apparently he felt he had betrayed something. "I shall have nothing more to say," he asserted, his expression becoming very hard.

Arthur faced Madge, hoping that perhaps she would come to his rescue, that perhaps she knew something of the trouble. She seemed about to speak when there was an interruption at the door.

"Do I intrude?"

A mocking element in the voice of the newcomer, almost imperceptible, was caught by Arthur. The headquarters detective recognized the man instantly, and knew that he in turn was recognized. Between Carter Baron, head of a recently established and licensed detective agency, and the star investigator of the city's homicide squad there was no love lost.

"You are Mr. Baron?" Mrs. Wellston advanced to him eagerly.

"Yes! And you are Mrs. Wellston?"

Arthur watched them with distaste. Baron was a bloodless, almost emaciated type of man, tall and unusually slender. In his face was every indication of unscrupulousness mixed with an inordinate personal pride. His clothes were extreme, his haberdashery gaudily immaculate. To Arthur it was almost inconceivable that this man could be a real detective, and yet in the first half dozen cases handled by Baron's agency he had been remarkably successful, three or four times putting the New York police force to shame. Only in the Smithwick case, handled by Arthur Zander, had Carter Baron met his match.

"This is Detective Zander, I believe," he remarked condescendingly, strolling to the side of Arthur as he removed foppish silk gloves.

Arthur's glance, having cultivated the habit largely against his will, strolled to Madge's face, and at once a peculiar thing struck him. He found her eyes wide with obvious fright as they

rested upon the face of this new detective. It struck Arthur that she knew him, had seen him before, and was somehow afraid.

Mrs. Wellston followed Baron to the center of the room.

"The police," she complained pettishly, "won't arrest Frank, when it is evident to any one at all that he is the one who killed my husband." Suddenly tears came into her eyes, and trickled down through the paint and powder on her cheeks. The tightened lines of her mouth, however, belied this indication of emotion. "Won't you take charge, Mr. Baron?" she pleaded.

Baron stared aggressively at the headquarters man.

"If I am not hampered, as I was in the Smithwick case, I shall produce results very rapidly, Mrs. Wellston.

Arthur grinned. He could not resist a thrust at both this conceited operative and the woman who was irritating him beyond all measure.

"Results in the Smithwick case were very satisfactory, that is, to the ends of justice, and I will guarantee that Mr. Baron is given the same opportunity this time." Facing the sergeant, he issued his orders crisply. "It is not necessary to hold the people in this room, but make sure, please, that no one leaves the house, and that no one"—a glance at Baron—"disturbs the body until the medical examiner arrives."

Hurrying to the side of Madge, he led her to a corner, noticing as he took her arm that she was trembling.

"You know him!" he whispered. "You have met Carter Baron before, I am sure."

She drew close to him, but waited until the others had left the room, watching as the sergeant accompanied Frank to keep him under nominal arrest. Then she put a hand on Arthur's, hardly realizing that she did so.

"You don't think my brother is guilty, do you?"

He shook his head.

"It is my honest opinion, so far, that he is not. It was a very brutal bit of work. From anyone of the type of your brother a crime like this would only be expected in the event of some great passion aroused and allowed to slip from control. He was not upstairs long enough to work himself up into such a rage."

She sighed with intense relief. "You will try to save him?"

"Of course!"

"The—the evidence against him is very strong, isn't it?"

"Circumstantially."

"Then——"

"Now, don't worry. Tell me why you are afraid of the private detective your stepmother has employed."

"I—I'm not sure it is the same man."

"What about him?"

"Well, I was out with Mrs. Wellston—Frank and I have always refused to call her anything but Mrs. Wellston—and at a place where we stopped for tea, somewhere way out in the country at an inn, she introduced me to the man, and he—he made love to me and—and he was terribly strong, and I couldn't stop him from—kissing me."

"Your stepmother?"

"She just laughed. I—I think she wanted me to like him. Ugh!"

"This man was Carter Baron?"

She shook her head in perplexed fashion.

"His name wasn't that and my stepmother didn't seem to know Mr. Baron when he came."

Arthur rose.

"You can't tell me anything about the quarrel between your brother and your father?"

Genuinely frightened, as though not quite sure of her ability to refuse him, she shook her head again very vigorously.

"I—I don't know anything about it," she lied, charming in her deceit.

Arthur left her, and hurried to the hall with the idea of examining the evidence in the nursery in detail. Something in the attitude of the officer stationed at the door caught him. With a slight gesture the policeman motioned him to approach with caution.

He did so, and found Carter Baron standing over the body, the sheet drawn back and the walking stick in his grasp. Baron was handling the cane with a handkerchief in either hand, and it seemed to the headquarters man that the operative from the private agency was not so much engaged in studying the stick for possible finger-marks as he was in wiping it, surreptitiously, so as to remove any that might be present.

"What the blue blazes!" Arthur leaped forward.

Baron was calm.

"Looking for finger marks," he explained.

"You——" Then Arthur realized that any accusation would be empty of proof and would accomplish nothing.

He strode over towards the window angrily. Could it be possible that Baron, out of spite, would deliberately destroy evidence? It was a preposterous assumption. And yet he knew that the private detective's self pride exceeded any ambition he might have in his work.

The next place to search for finger prints was the window sill. Arthur dropped to his knees. In a moment an exclamation escaped him. He called the policeman and Baron over.

"I want you both to notice that these prints are here," he remarked, determined to have witnesses to the fact. Then he leaned over closer, for the marks were very faint. "Hell!" he muttered, in keen disappointment. "They—they are glove marks!"

Baron smiled in superior fashion.

"I made those myself. I let myself out the window to see if it were possible for some one to clamber in. I put on the gloves so as not to soil

my hands." With the explanation he produced the gloves.

Arthur glanced at the policeman for confirmation.

"I was out, sir," the officer stated. "He asked me to get him a couple of handkerchiefs to handle the cane with, and I didn't see him."

Arthur was puzzled. He stared at Baron, and Baron met his gaze without flinching. Yet there was that in Baron's glance which disturbed him.

Arthur turned away and left the room. At the door he cautioned the officer not to lose sight of the scene of the murder again. Then he went downstairs, hunting Frank with the idea of attempting once more to make the boy talk of the quarrel.

There was no one in the lower portion of the house. He reascended the stairs, and went back to the nursery, uneasy now that he suspected the motives of Baron. The detective had left.

In the front part of the upper floor, however, his keen ear caught the sound of muffled voices beyond a door, and he opened it softly, and very slightly. To his amazement he saw, through the narrow crack, reflected in the cheval glass within the chamber, the figures of Carter Baron and Mrs. Wellston. At first their voices were too low for him to make out any part of the conversation. But there was no mistaking the manner in which she placed both hands upon his shoulder. There was no concealing the fact that she looked into the face of the man she had greeted as a stranger with an affection never born in this last five, ten, or perhaps fifteen minutes.

Suddenly she raised her voice unconsciously. It was very slight, but it enabled Arthur to hear.

"You're doing fine, and you've got to go through with it, you've got to go through with it!"

Baron's answer was inaudible, but they broke away from each other with evident caution and fear and Arthur, drawing the door shut softly and quickly, raced down the hall and to the stairs before either could see him.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN AMAZING DISCOVERY

"THE medical examiner is here, Zander!" the policeman stationed at the front door called up the stairs to Arthur.

Arthur descended to greet him, then led the way to the nursery. Dr. Melville was a florid, ruddy individual, one of the best on the city's staff. Late, he was anxious to be at his task and away.

"Had a breakdown," he explained, as he lifted the sheet from the body. Then he turned his attention to the examination.

Arthur left the room, closing the door and directing the patrolman to call him when the doctor was through. Returning to the first floor, more to think over the conflicting elements in the case than with any idea of definite action before the doctor's report, he was aware suddenly that a man was beckoning from the rear of the reception hall. It was the old gardener.

"Will you come with me, sir?"

"What is it——?"

"Call me Ernest; Ernest Shore is my name, sir!"

"You know something about this case?"

"Yes, sir! Will you come?"

Arthur followed out to the quarters over the frame garage, once a barn, where the gardener and chauffeur had their rooms.

"What do you know, Ernest?" he asked.

The old man sat on the edge of his couch, slumping up into a misshapen ball. The light from the one dim incandescent bulb cast strange shadows into his deep-set features, and as he talked his expressions went through strange contortions, due to a habit of grimacing with every word. Yet the old servant radiated sincerity, and Arthur knew that he was not only honest, but was careful of his words and truthful.

"I'm an old man," he began. "I used to till the land on which this house is built long before Grant Wellston was born. As a boy I was hired by his grandfather on a farm they had on the other end of Washington Heights, at 135th Street, and then when his son, Grant's father, bought here, I came here as overseer, and we raised corn and vegetables, and had orchards overlooking the Hudson before the street cars had built out farther than the old place below, or before the elevated to Harlem had even been dreamed of. Then when Grant Wellston built this home, and sold part of the farm land, I became gardener and——"

"You said you knew something of the murder?" Arthur interrupted.

"Yes! Yes, sir! You see nothing has been right since Mr. Grant's first wife died, and none of us have ever liked our new mistress because, well"—the old man was apologetic—"you see she isn't a lady."

"You mean she didn't belong to Mr. Wellston's social set?"

"Indeed, no!" The gardener was indignant. "I'm no snob, and neither was Mr. Grant. But this second Mrs. Wellston—who knows anything about her, or where she came from, or anything else? She lived in a Times Square hotel, and had no friends and—well, I can't say as a fact what I only think, sir, but I know I'm right, and I know Mr. Grant would never have married her if she hadn't made him do it."

"You don't actually know anything of the murder?"

"Yes, sir! I do. You see I'm the handy man about because the butler can't do anything but clean silver, and I can use tools if I do say it. So I was in the house repairing the washstand,

in the little room off Mr. Grant's study, and I heard him and Mr. Frank nearly three weeks ago——"

"Quarreling?"

"Yes, sir! Mr. Frank he says to his father: 'If you know the truth now, why don't you expose her?'

"And Mr. Grant, he replies: 'I've made my bed, boy, and it is the proper thing for me to lie in it.'

" 'You're not going to do anything about it?' demands Mr. Frank.

"Mr. Grant was very patient; I could tell from his voice. 'I'm having a new will drawn up, and in the next week or so I'll sign it, and then absolutely everything, every penny, will go to you and Madge. Previously more than half went to my new wife, as you know.'

" 'And meanwhile you ask Madge to live in the same house——' "

Ernest straightened for a moment, then slumped down again into the ball. "That's all I heard, sir, because I got excited just then, and dropped a wrench, and they heard the noise, and went out."

"But you know nothing of the murder itself?"

"Doesn't that show, sir, that Mr. Frank is innocent?"

"Why?"

"Well, sir, I've been reading detective cases, and they're always talking about motives, and if the new will has not been signed, and Mr. Frank only gets half as much money under the old will as under the new, then why did he kill his father?"

"It might have been a fit of anger, Ernest."

"No!" The old man shook his head vigorously. "No, sir! I'm sure Mr. Frank is innocent; in fact, I go hang for it, I'm that sure. But"—a cunning expression came into his face, as though he were proud of his own cleverness—"if he really was going to do it, sir, why didn't he wait another day, sir, until the new will was signed?"

"You mean the new——"

"The lawyer was to come out to-morrow morning. I heard Mr. Grant order the car to meet him."

"In that case, Ernest," rejoined the headquarters man, "in that case we must suspect Mrs. Wellston of killing her husband, so as to save the fortune coming to her."

"That's exactly what I think, sir!"

"Nonsense!" Arthur frowned. "The murder was done by a man. It took a lusty swing to crush that old man's skull. No woman on earth ever could have done it. Besides, Frank Wellston saw a man escape through the window, and there were the tracks of a man in the garden where he jumped."

The old servant shook his head in disbelief.

"You—you'll see!"

Making his way back to the house, Arthur learned that Dr. Melville was waiting for him.

"Listen, Zander!" The physician, who had known the headquarters man for some time, lowered his voice. "This is not as simple as it looks, and I'm giving you this quietly, so you can act before any one suspects what I have discovered. Maybe you'll catch your party before he skips."

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"Just this! Grant Wellston was not killed by that blow on his head, nor by the other blow on his chest."

"Good heavens! How can that be?"

"This man"—the medical examiner indicated the body—"was given a dose of strychnine, enough to kill a dozen men. Then, when he lay on the floor up here, some one struck the blows, I suppose in the wild idea that in that way they would cover up the fact of his being poisoned. In fact"—hesitatingly—"in some cases as open and shut as this, I might have let it escape me at that. Anyhow, I figure he was either unconscious, with paralysis of the respiratory organs and heart already well along, or else he was still struggling, possibly just caught in the first clutch of the drug's effect, and in that event the blows may have been struck to quiet him."

"Strychnine!" Arthur's expression became very serious. "I begin to see through this now. Strychnine is easy to obtain—perhaps——" He paused, then he seized the physician by the coat. "Come! Quick!"

Leading the way into the quarters of Mrs. Wellston, Arthur found no signs of her. In her bath he found, as he anticipated, a medicine chest with several shelves arrayed with rows of bottles, three and four deep on each shelf.

"Anything here with strychnine in it, doctor? She's the type of woman apt to be taking a heart stimulant."

It was a brief search. Not the physician but Arthur himself found the little vial thrown behind the bathtub empty. The label, half removed, and the dust of the tablets, betrayed the nature of its contents.

In the hall Arthur summoned the policeman on guard at the little white room.

"Hurry and find your sergeant. Under no circumstances allow Mrs. Wellston to leave the house. If necessary place her under arrest, but do not allow her to have any conversation with Carter Baron. Understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WELLSTON SKELETON.

ARTHUR'S concern was to find Frank, or Madge. He determined now to confront them with the true cause of their father's death, and to prevail upon them to give them the facts which Frank, at least, knew concerning Mrs. Wellston.

On the second floor there was no sign of any of

the members of the household. On the first floor, hitherto deserted, he found the brother and sister together. For just an instant they did not hear him as he entered the library, and so he caught Madge's final remark.

"There is nothing to be gained by keeping silent, Frank," she was pleading. "I think you should tell this headquarters man. I am sure you can trust him, and I——"

At that moment she heard him and turned, finding him right behind her. She colored, and her pretty confusion was sufficient evidence of the fact that his presence thrilled her as much as her mere look had served to set his heart to pounding within him. But it was no time for sentiment.

"There is something I would like to ex——" he began.

Still flushed and wholly confused, she did not wait, but fled from the room, leaving him with her brother.

Arthur cleared his throat.

"Listen, Wellston!" He took a seat by the other. "It is distinctly to your interest to give me your confidence and to reveal the facts you have insisted upon retaining to yourself. Many of the things in this case have come to light in the past half an hour and——"

"It is not that I want to keep anything from you, or from the police," Frank interrupted. "It is simply that I'm afraid to make statements I cannot prove, on the one hand, while on the other I wish to preserve my father's memory."

"You have no idea who killed your father?"

"Yes, but——"

"Who?"

"I do not know the name, the identity, nor any of the facts relating to the man I suspect," he replied. "Now, how can I explain such a suspicion?"

"Well"—Arthur leaned close—"it might interest you to know that your father did not die of the blows given him, but from a heavy dose of strychnine poisoning, administered just previously. The blows were dealt either to cover up the true cause of death, or because the drug did not act quickly enough."

"Good God!" Frank sat bolt upright. "And——"

"The strychnine came from a bottle of tablets in the possession of your stepmother." Arthur paused. "Now are you willing to tell me the hold this woman had upon your father?"

"Yes!" The answer was a sharp hiss. For once Frank made no effort to conceal his hatred for his stepmother. "I'll tell you everything quickly, and if you can prove that she"—he clenched his fists—"the reason my father married Clara Bray," he began, "was that she——"

At that instant a piercing shriek, followed by several distinct screams before the voice was hushed, told both men of some great danger to Madge. There was no question but that it was her voice, no doubt of the element of fear in her cry. Without waiting for second thought, Arthur sprang for the door. Frank followed, but Arthur was aware, dimly, that a police officer stopped the brother, preventing him from leaving the house.

What had happened? Just where was Madge, and just what sort of peril beset her? Seemingly the scream had come from outside, and Arthur raced through the front door, pausing on the porch uncertainly. There was no further sound, and while there were movements of lights here and there in the distance, showing that the neighborhood had been aroused, there was no sign of the girl nor of any possible attackers.

Arthur knew that there were but two approaches to this shoulder of land, the main road which had brought him to a steep incline winding its way down back of the house to a New York Central siding. It seemed improbable that anyone attacking the girl could escape by the road along the ridge, or would carry her off by that route. After an instant's reflection, therefore, he darted around towards the rear of the house.

"Mr. Detective!"

In the gloom he recognized the gardener.

"Did you see her? Do you know what happened?"

"He's—he's carrying her off!" gasped the old man.

"Who? Where?"

Out of breath, the gardener pointed to a little used road leading up back of a private estate on the Hudson side of the main avenue. It was a way which skirted the precipitous edge of the rock formation, guarded only by a wire fence, but it offered the chance of a circuit around the parts of the little settlement of homes most likely to be watched. Delaying for no further information, Arthur sprinted in the direction indicated, praying that he would stumble into no obstacle in the impenetrable darkness, drawing his revolver as he ran.

Although he could not see a foot ahead he redoubled his efforts, and then, very suddenly, two figures were outlined just before him, silhouetted against the dull glimmer of the Hudson's surface in the distance.

With a flying leap he tackled the man, and caught him unawares. Together they rolled to the ground, but from that instant the advantage of surprise was no longer with the headquarters man, and he discovered that his antagonist was no mean fighter. Descending to primitive methods in the blackness, seeking each to crush the head of the other against the jagged points of rock protruding in the road, rolling, scrambling, and grasping for any momentary advantage, no matter how slight, they literally wallowed in the badly graded road, raising clouds of dust which penetrated into eyes and mouths and nostrils, choking and gagging them. But still the conflict continued, Arthur with no idea of the identity of this

man who had sought to carry off the girl, the man probably equally without an idea who Arthur might be.

Meanwhile Madge struggled with her bonds. Releasing the gag from her mouth, she screamed again and again. Then she dropped to the side of the men locked in each other's embrace, seeking to help whoever had come to her rescue.

In the night she could not tell one from the other. But her hand struck an object on the ground, a flashlight dropped by the man who had abducted her. With an exclamation she flashed it on into their faces. Then Arthur knew and understood. The man he fought was the detective engaged by Mrs. Wellston to railroad Frank to prison for murder. It was Carter Baron, the private operative he had had for his rival in the Smithwick case, whom he had outwitted badly on that occasion. Now he would more than outwit his rival. He would see that he was punished for criminal complicity in the crime. He did not understand this attempt to carry off Madge, but he realized fully the real nature of the man. A great determination welled up within him. He gritted his teeth and threw new strength into his straining muscles.

Baron seemed to realize the change in Arthur. In turn he sought to rise to the occasion, in turn he attempted to redouble his efforts. But in the mind of Arthur was the image of this little girl whom he had not seen since his boyhood, but who had come to mean a great deal to him in the hour of his investigation.

With a mighty heave he rolled his antagonist over his head and jumped to his feet. Baron rose, but the conflict was uneven now. Arthur seized him, bending his spine back in his grasp, gradually perfecting a wrestling hold which would not be broken.

Suddenly Madge screamed. The fence, against which they had been carried in this last phase of the struggle, gave way with a sharp snap of wire and a great section of it went crashing a hundred feet below to the tracks of the New York Central main line, a sheer drop. For an instant the two men tottered on the brink, then Arthur gave a lurch of desperation, and caught his balance precariously at the very edge. Baron, more weakened by the struggle, waved his arms against the dull purple sky for a time which seemed interminable. To Arthur, held motionless in horror, it was like the nightmare of some Dutch windmill impinged in mid-air and poised there without support. After all, it was only an instant. There was a scream as the man realized that he could not check his fall, a sort of rush of air more imagined than heard as he fell, and the dull impact of deadened flesh and bone upon the level surface of the track beneath.

Arthur took the flash, and saw where it was possible to descend the formation of rock, a path partly fashioned by man and partly the caprice of time and the action of the elements.

"You hurry back to the house," he directed, facing Madge.

Then he made his way down, a dangerous trip at night. Several times he slipped, but finally he arrived at the bottom safely.

There were no trains, fortunately, as the space against the wall of rock was almost devoid of shelter. Baron was breathing still and Arthur dragged him to the side of the track, feeling that nothing could be done for him.

"Is he dead?"

To his amazement Arthur suddenly grasped that Madge was at his side. The girl, with all the handicap of her skirts and a woman's strength, had followed him down the path on the very face of the granite. It was inconceivable. Without full realization of what he was doing he pulled her to his arms and found that he was trembling now, as well as she.

"You shouldn't have done that," he scowled. "Suppose you had fallen?"

"Would—would you care?"

He kissed her.

Then he remembered the dying man at his feet.

"Baron?"

"Yes!" The voice was very faint.

"Have you anything to say?"

"Not a thing. I may be—be going on, but I won't help you."

"Mrs. Wellston is under arrest."

"Mrs.——" At that the injured man tried to rise but all movement was impossible to him.

"Why?" he demanded, with momentary strength.

"For the murder of her husband."

"She didn't kill him. I did! I climbed through the window. I—I confess. You must release her. Promise to release her."

"You struck the two blows with the cane?"

"Yes! It is so! There are two of you. You have heard my confession."

"Baron!" Arthur was stern. "She gave him strychnine and you struck those blows to shield her, to cover up her crime. Is that right?"

The injured man refused to answer.

Suddenly Madge dropped to her knees.

"Is it true? Tell me if it is true that you are my half-brother; that my father is your father! I heard Mrs. Wellston say so to my father."

Something in the touch of the girl seemed to soften him.

"It is not true," he admitted, very weak now. "I guess it is all up—anyway. That was the scheme we arranged to make your father marry my mother. He was made to believe that I was his natural son. It—it is a black lie."

All at once there was the roar of an oncoming train, and Arthur drew the girl close against the rock. When the cars had swept past he stooped down once more, but now the man was dead. In the presence of death Madge crept to his arms once more.

"Am—am I very forward?" she asked.

A Piece Of Yellow String

By KATHERINE STAGG

"WHAT in the world are you looking at, Carol Rivers?"

"Can't you see?"

"All I see is a very dirty bit of grocer's cord, and I fail to register any thrill at the sight; what's the idea?"

"Only this; that it was not there yesterday, and no one else passes here but me in a month of Sundays."

"Well, and then——"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose; but, you know, I have been seeing quite a lot of Arundel Marvin, the detective, lately, and he has rather got me into the way of noticing trifles." Carol's beautiful eyes gazed thoughtfully toward the hills across the valley.

The two girls were walking along a cliff that would bring them to a zigzag of stairs that connected Upper Locust with the lovely village of Lower Locust, nestled along a brook, with encircling trees so thick and leafy that Carol called it in her joking way, Vallombrose, New Jersey. Unbrageous Vale, indeed!

"Well, Mr. Marvin is some looker, I'll tell the world, but if he is going to make you dippy enough to spot a movie scenario in a piece of string fallen into the grass, it is about time you had a change of dancing partners."

Jane Leigh was short, dark, and very practical; Carol rather tall, slender, with soft, abundant auburn hair, and the fair skin that goes with the ruddy coloring, not the brilliant red of the Circe, but that loveliest shade one knows denotes an exquisite sensitive nature.

"Jane, did you ever meet that Mrs. Gage who moved up on Fairmount Road last year?"

"No; why, I heard she would not let any one in; has a Jap boy to shoo all delegates from church or Woman's Club away; even the butcher reports he has never seen her, although he admits some one there likes thick beefsteaks, and is able to pay for them, too; and that is some miracle in these times."

Carol smiled in due appreciation, but was thoughtful again in an instant.

"So you would be surprised if I told you that I have met and talked with her? Yes, I nearly always go down to the post-office this way, as it is so much shorter than around by the Turnpike. Since the White place burned down, and Mrs. Wilcox went to Boston to stay indefinitely with her army of sick relatives, I have this part of the Cliff quite to myself. But one day I met Mrs. Gage, and we got talking, as we were both caught in a heavy shower, and took refuge on the veranda of the Wilcox house. She seemed ordinary enough, but just as we were leaving she grasped one of the pillars suddenly as if she were struck with something awful; she turned white as a sheet and gasped out "The tank room, the tank room!" Then in a minute or two she seemed all right again, and when I asked her what she meant, she said I must have misunderstood her, and acted rather offish about it; still she did ask me to go and see her some day, and I believe I will; suppose we go now—are you game?"

"Fine!" laughed Jane, "material for the second reel; but, you see, the mysterious lady did not ask me, so I think I shall proceed on my dull way to give a music lesson."

"Oh, come on," urged Carol.

"No, lady fair, you have been very good to give me the freedom of your exclusive Cliff, but mysteries are not in my line; I see you have carefully put that old piece of string away in your pocketbook, so if you should meet some philandering grocery boy, and all the story be spoiled, you might think I was a 'wrong influence'; I think that is what they call it in the patter of the psychists, isn't it? And I'll lay a wager that is the line you are thinking along, now isn't it?"

"Well, what if it is? Everybody's doing it, aren't they?"

By this time they had come almost to the steep steps, and the path made a sudden dip, with deep gullies on each side, half filled with loose stones and dead leaves.

As Jane turned and laughed in her bantering way her foot slipped, and she half fell down the bank of one of these gullies, misplacing the rubbish that looked as if it had been accumulating for years.

As Carol hastily helped her to scramble back to the path, they saw something protruding from the ooze at the bottom of the wild tangle of vines and weeds.

Both girls stood transfixed, for what they saw was the outlines of a human form partly buried under the leaves; but, even to their unaccustomed eyes, there was something sinister about the way it was almost doubled up, with a couple of heavy stones placed squarely on it, that at once did away with the idea of a tramp asleep, as was their first natural thought.

Carol's sensitive face was a wild flicker of emotions as she clung to an overhanging tree for support.

Jane was the first to find her voice, though sturdy as she was she found herself trembling in a way new and strange to her healthy nerves.

"Of all the awful sights! My heavens, Carol! don't go nearer—it—it—do you see, Carol, it had,

I mean it hasn't, got any head! Oh, Carol, come away!"

For one tense moment of horror neither spoke, but each struggled to get some semblance of self-control.

Then Carol in a whisper, very unlike her own soft contralto, usually full and rich, and one of her chiefest charms:

"What must we do? We couldn't touch it."

"No," answered Jane; "oh, no, we couldn't touch it, and I think that I've heard that in any accident one must always leave things just as you find them until some one comes; that is, the police—or some one."

"Accident! Do you think it could have been an accident?"

"Oh, perhaps; the—the—rest of it may be down there somewhere, but what shall we do?"

Just then came a full-throated lilt of French song bursting on the summer quiet in such a way that it really helped to restore the two girls to some of their sanity.

In such a beautiful world of sunshine and song, how could such horrors be?

Again Jane spoke:

"Who can that be? And where is the nearest telephone? The voice probably owns a phone; it sounds sort of rich and civilized; now, Carol, don't faint, whatever you do; if you do I'll jump off the Cliff, for I don't like the third reel of your drama one little bit."

Horror affects people differently, and where one will be stricken dumb another, sometimes with even keener sensibilities, will find a sort of hysterical help in going back to some recent joking mode of speech.

So Carol answered, even while her whole nature shrunk from the grewsome meaning of that dreadful bundle in the depths of the gully:

"Who knows, Jane, but my poor little piece of yellow string may not lead us to the key of this tragedy. Mr. Marvin says——"

Jane did not allow her to get any further, but exclaimed:

"The very thing! We'll make a rush for the singer's house, and call up your friend. He'll know just what to do, and we can keep out of it. Lucky he is taking a vacation out here just now. I'm glad I have the vote, and I do just ache to sit on a jury, but I am not anxious to face a coroner's inquest, you can bet."

The singer from an airy little chanson had now risen to greater heights with one of Debussy's dramatic recitatives, as if some emanation of the strange event had somehow colored her mood.

Not a soul was in sight, and the glow of the mellow afternoon was so rich and golden that it seemed the right and proper setting of all that was peaceful.

"Jane, can you see—do you think it was just a tramp, or could it have been a gentleman? Oh, Jane, wouldn't it be awful if it were any one we knew?"

"My dear, it ought not to be any more awful if it, or he, had been some one other than a tramp, but we are all snobs, more or less. I remember a couple of years ago one day the word came that a tramp had been killed by the five o'clock express, and when the body was found there wasn't one cent in the pockets, only a half-eaten apple and an empty whisky flask, and every one around here made jokes about the poor devil's last meal, etc. It was beastly heartless, but the papers seemed to think it quite a rich piece of humor, and it was copied far and near. It did not strike my ideas of what is funny at the time, and now I don't think I could ever laugh again at that brand of so-called fun. But come on, and we will see if we can get our own Mr. Marvin on the wire; that is, if you will allow me to feel a part interest in having a handy detective friend just in the nick of time."

It was quite evident, as Jane recovered her own poise, she was trying bravely to boost her friend's courage by her well-meant efforts at a light and casual tone.

Hand in hand, like children, they hurried toward the direction from which the music had so strangely broken in on their sorry adventure.

"Do you know," trembled Carol, "I believe that the nearest house is that of the Mrs. Gage I was talking about. Oh, don't it seem like hours ago, instead of just a few minutes?"

"Then Mrs. Gage let it be; and we'll only hope the exotic singer has a telephone, and will be in a receptive mood. Odd nobody knew she could sing like that, for, let me tell you, fright and all, that was some operatic stunt, if I am any judge, and I ought to be."

"Jane!" Carol stood still in the path. "Mrs. Gage told me she did not know one note of music the day I met her."

"Well, she probably has a visitor, then."

"No, that could hardly be, either, for she said she was here studying some kind of thing that she could not do unless entirely alone."

"Oh, bother, what of it, she may be taking a private course in the Seven Keys of Solomon—or Baldpate—for all I know or care; I only want to use her telephone, and then she can hold communion with all the shades of Thibet for all I know or care," said Jane. "Yes, I'll say it again: she can be the witch of Endor herself, for all I know or care, so there! She seems to have made a deep impression on you, Carol, and I should think, in these circumstances, she would be no more than a stuffed figure, as long as she owns the triumph of all the ages in the way of the magic wire that beats both time and distance."

They were just passing through a clump of thick trees, and Jane was holding tight to Carol's trembling arm, while she rattled on, hoping to get her in more calm a mood before the interview that Jane, for all her nonsense, could see Carol dreaded.

A little beyond the trees there was a thicket of lilacs resplendent in white and purple blooms. This thicket skirted the boundaries of the place

where the new Mrs. Gage had recently installed herself.

As the girls hurried along the rough path, evidently seldom used, they were startled by the ringing of a bell in the very midst of the bushes, here almost as tall as the trees; a bell that rang in the staccato periods of the wizard telephone, strange enough to hear in these surroundings, and doubly strange to the girls in their predicament. They involuntarily stood still for a second, and then heard a soft voice whisper in some unknown tongue what they knew must be the well known "Hello!"

A short dialogue, apparently, followed, and then a slim white-coated figure skulked rapidly toward the house.

"That must be the Jap servant," said Jane; "but what a queer place for a telephone; I wonder if we would dare use it, instead of going to the house."

A moment's observation, however, showed that it was in a tiny shed of boards, but securely locked, the key, no doubt, reposing in the jacket of the yellow boy.

"Well, upon my soul, if that don't beat all," continued Jane. "I've always heard that wherever one sees a Jap there is sure to be a mystery, but they seem to be coming in bunches to-day. Come on, Carol, don't weaken now; I feel that it is Detective Marvin to the rescue, and we'd better be quick about it."

A few steps brought them to a stucco house, embowered in vines and great clumps of bushes, hydrangeas growing in some places fully ten feet high; here and there slim trellis-like structures, covered with rambler roses, and the never-failing lilacs that predominated, made a bower of beauty, but even so, there was a secretive air as if it were in hiding, for all was in wild confusion with no trace of pruner's knife.

Almost running now, they pressed a button at the top of a flight of steps and breathlessly waited.

Almost instantly the door was opened and a crisp, smiling yellow boy stood expectantly for their request, not a trace of haste in his manner, although it could have been hardly more than seconds since he had vanished from the mysterious hidden phone closet in the bushes a hundred yards away.

Jane naturally took the lead, and inquired in as calm a voice as she could command: "May we see Mrs. Gage at once on a matter of vital importance?"

"Missy Gage not home to-day." But he was pushed aside without ceremony as a tall, commanding figure came rapidly from some inner room, and a husky, rough voice invited them to enter with a wave of an imperious hand—a gesture that seemed to be anxious and hurried as their own feelings would have dictated.

A living-room of the conventional type met their eyes; the only remarkable thing in it being a very fine open grand piano, the case inlaid with mother-of-pearl, a most sumptuous and unusual piece of furniture.

"Mrs. Gage," Carol began, "do you remember me? I meant to have called before, but I have been busy, and now I can't even apologize, for something has happened. Please, may we use your telephone? Something dreadful——"

She got no further with her halting question; for a change so remarkable seemed to be taking place in the impassive features of the tall woman standing in the middle of the floor—a metamorphosis so weird that even in this day of strange events the two girls were transfixed by surprise. Mrs. Gage was a woman about fifty years old, with gray hair, dull eyes, big-boned, and with an air of being altogether careless of the arts that vanquish age in most of the past-forty women of to-day. Without a word she motioned them to chairs, sinking into a large wicker settee herself; she clutched the arms of it a moment, a violent shudder shook her, and her eyes closed.

Then in a voice, musical and vibrant, and with an accent very different from the one speech they had heard, she tried to speak. Her eyes were closed, and her entire face had undergone a marvellous change, taking on a vivacity of expression totally lacking in their first impression.

"Oh! it is so very lucky you come. I am Chlotilde of many years ago, and I try to help this poor lady, for she is in so great trouble. Her brother gone, gone; all her what you call money—much money, it also gone. She worry sick. I come every day, and sing through her to bring some one who can find—but all these people so thick, no, stupid, they cannot understand. There is evil boy make worse all the time. I give her some strength, but how can I tell her, if no one here; only through music I tell her, tell her so much. She knows there is something I could show the way, but she can't see what it can be. Now you come, I leave a message. Quick! I cannot stay long, it makes me choke." Another shudder, and Mrs. Gage opened her eyes, all the animation died out of her face, and in her own husky voice she asked: "Yes, you were saying——"

The fascination of both drunkenness and war has been described as an intensification of life. In the same way horror and tragic influences will sometimes open up short-cuts through the conventions, even stabbing to the truth with a lightning-like dart of intuition.

Carol rose, and took the trembling hand of the strange woman sitting rigidly on the wicker settee.

"Mrs. Gage, where is your brother? How long has he been gone?"

A look of amazement passed over the stolid features, and she barely whispered:

"How do you know?"

"Never mind that, but tell me quickly all you can. I think—I am almost sure I—we can help you to find out the truth."

The husky voice sank still lower, but as if hypnotized, she replied without hesitation:

"My brother disappeared about ten days ago, and I have not heard one word from him since; he left here one night, carrying two large suitcases, containing a collection of jewels and other valuables that had belonged to a great aunt of ours, who was at one time a famous Russian opera singer, Madame Chlotilde Vasiloff. He was to have put them in a safety deposit vault the next day. He had blamed me for my negligence in keeping them here. I loved them, and liked to see them and handle them. They seemed to exert an influnce over me, and I did not want to part with them. I am studying certain branches of the occult, and I believe there is more safety in the protection of the unseen powers than in all the safety vaults in the world. But I will not believe he did anything wrong."

Jane had sat spellbound through this strange scene, as she was totally inexperienced along these lines, but at the mention of the name "Chlotilde" both girls exchanged a startled glance, and a glimmering of the truth came to them simultaneously.

Mrs. Gage seemed to have sunk into a sort of stupor, and Carol hurriedly whispered:

"Jane, do you see? She is a partly developed medium, and the spirit of this Madame Chlotilde is trying to speak through her, and tell her about the fate of her brother. Wouldn't it be too queer if that were he we found? Lord! What must we do?"

Before Jane could answer spasmodic shudders once more shook the frame of the suffering woman, her face quivered, she tossed her head back with a gesture that loosened her gray hair until it fell in wavy torrents about her shoulders. Beautiful hair it was, that shade of ashen gray that comes to those who have been Titian beauties in their youth; and, truly, a look of youth was struggling to take possession, as it were. Once more the musical tones rang out, so different from the natural husky voice of the tranced woman.

"Oh, this poor, poor lady! She was not strong enough, for much evil was here. Yellow boy! Watch! The power gets weak; I cannot stay. Key little house, hang on nail in kitchen. To-night some time——" The voice trailed fainter and fainter, then almost inaudibly came just one word—"tank"—and it broke off.

A silence followed that the terrified girls would never know consisted of seconds or hours.

Practical Jane was the first to speak. Ignoring the spent form of the strangely possessed woman still trembling as if from some dreadful exertion, crouching and huddled on the wicker settee, she crossed the room and touched with a steady hand a small bell she had noticed on a teakwood stand.

"Carol, that Jap boy has got to answer a question or two before we go much further."

The slim, white-coated figure slid into the room at once, and Jane asked very sternly:

"Young man, will you be good enough to show me your telephone?"

"No telephone here, Missy Gage no like."

Again the girls exchanged glances, then Jane continued: "No, you have no phone at all?"

"No; telephone one damn nuisance." And with a sullen look that was very defiance, "Missy Gage like no bother; she no like people here."

"Oh, very well; but didn't I see a motorcycle outside the porch door at the side of the house when we entered?"

The yellow boy nodded, but remained silent, with the expressionless stolidity that no white man can command.

Jane had somewhat recovered her usual composure, and was not to be discouraged, so she went on, "You ride it, I suppose?"

"I go buy some days to butcher, and go to post-office."

"Good; then you take a note to the village for your mistress; she is ill, and needs a doctor."

"No, no doctor man, she all right bimeby. You go, she no like. She tell me, I know plenty; she all good to-morrow."

Here Carol intervened; slipping a yellow-backed bill from her purse, she scribbled a line on a bit of paper torn from her pocket memo book. Rolling them together, she said as casually as she could:

"Perhaps you are right; I don't think she really needs a doctor as much as rest, but I wish you would ride into the village, and leave this for Capt. Arundel Marvin for me. You will find him at the Golf Club; I want him to bring a motor for my friend and myself so we can leave as soon as possible. I hurt my foot coming up the Cliff to-day, and it is too far to walk; I was to dine with Captain Marvin to-night. You will be sure to find him there."

The Jap hesitated a moment, but as this promised to be the quickest way to get rid of the unwelcome guests, and the size of the bill being a most powerful argument, he concluded to accede to the seemingly harmless request.

When he had ridden away, they did what they could to make Mrs. Gage comfortable. She seemed utterly exhausted, and looked a mere shell of the woman who had shown such strange power a few moments before.

Timidly Carol suggested.

"I wonder if you would think it an intrusion, but really a cup of tea would be the best thing for you. May we go in your kitchen and look for the tea things?"

"Oh, I ought to have had Suto do that before he left; you must pardon me."

"That is perfectly all right; trust any woman to find the tea caddy and fixin's," answered Jane, for she had caught the drift of Carol's idea at once.

"If you would be so very kind," Mrs. Gage replied.

The girls found a spotless kitchen, and proceeded to make the tea, knowing it would help, even while their busy eyes and fingers were

searching for the mysterious key. The Jap boy must have felt entirely confident of the secrecy of the hidden phone booth, for he had not taken the precaution of securing the key. Neatly hung on a hook beneath his white starched coat, they found it without difficulty, and Carol clutched it with an added thrill when she saw that it was suspended by a piece of yellow string, identical with the piece that she had found on the grounds of the deserted Wilcox place.

Holding it out triumphantly, she said:

"Oh, Jane, see; a pretty good clue, eh?"

Jane nodded grimly as they went back into the living-room. Presently they were cozily occupied with the tea things as quietly as any three ladies on the Cliff.

The minutes served to get the story of the disappearance of young Roland Whittaker, Mrs. Gage's only brother, who had started from her house with the almost priceless jewels of their great aunt. They had been smuggled out of Russia at the beginning of the war, and had been in the possession of Mrs. Gage ever since. Roland had been a young man who loved the gay and easy ways of life, and when nothing was heard from him day after day, suspicion was all too easy to point out a theft on his part. But his sister had been convinced from the first that he had been done away with, and would not allow her legal advisers to take any public measures; loving and believing in her brother as she did, she hoped against hope that at least his innocence would be proved without publicity, although from the beginning she had felt that he was dead.

When the main points of the tale were clear, a sinister crime grew in proportion in their minds, and the dead body in the gully, hidden under the ruck of dead leaves, was all too likely that of the ill-fated young man.

Rising, Carol led the way to the kitchen, ostensibly to take out the tea tray. She whispered to Jane to keep on talking to Mrs. Gage, and to hold her attention for only a few minutes. Rattling the dishes busily, she waited until she heard their voices in quiet converse, then slipped out the back door, and fairly flew to the little house hidden in the clump of trees.

Sure enough, the key fitted the plain plank door, and breathlessly Carol called the number of the Golf Club.

Asking for Marvin, she clung to the board shelf for support until his cheery voice answered her call.

"Hello! Captain Marvin? This is Carol—Carol Rivers. Yes, I know I am late, but never mind that; did you get a note brought by a Jap boy? No? I sent him, but I was afraid he would change his mind. I want you to get a car and come out here as quickly as you possibly can. Where? At the end of Fairmount Road. I am at a house that a Mrs. Gage took some time ago, next to the last house on the Cliff, near the big Wilcox place that is empty. Hurry, and bring some one to help. Something dreadful has happened. Oh, no—not to me; that is, I only found it out; but get here quick, for I am afraid the Jap will come back, and you must get here first. Listen! I'll be waiting by the big clump of cedars. Hurry, hurry!"

An hour later a party of three men led by the stalwart Captain Marvin broke into the Wilcox house, the village constable being of the group, and feeling justified by the story related in gasps by Carol when she met them as she had promised. They had removed the body from the gully by the side of the path which was so seldom traveled that it might easily have been hidden there for years if the girl's foot had not slipped on that portentous afternoon.

The clothing was of fine texture, and denoted a man of means. The hands were refined and had been well kept. Not a paper or label remained, and that they could not even suggest that Mrs. Gage should see the body, as that measure seemed too horrible for even the seasoned men whose business it is to attend to such grewsome business.

At first they had scouted the idea that those strangely whispered words, "The tank room! The tank room!" could have any significance, but Carol insisted, and so that grisly search began.

An unhinged screen in the cellar of the house had been found; it could easily have been a means of getting into the house by a lean, slippery creature like the Jap, but was altogether too small for the full-bodied men of the detective party.

Dark green shades pulled down at every window made the place as black as night, but the pocket torches of the men showed the way up the stairs to the top of the house.

The tank room was just back of the billiard room, its door partly concealed by heavy curtains, and down a short flight of steps, for it was on a different level from the rest of the floor. A queer place, full of angles and niches made by the gable roof. A few minutes poking about, however, brought to light the two suitcases.

Going into the great billiard room which ran the full width of the house, they made short work of cutting open one of the suitcases, and a perfect glory of gems ran out on the green cloth.

Captain Marvin shrugged and murmured:

"Gad! I never took much stock in the spirits, except in a bottle, but the old lady sure gave us the right dope this time?"

A still more horrible duty remained. A little further search rewarded their efforts. Under a pile of junk such as often will lie undisturbed for years was a round package, wrapped in paper and tied with a piece of yellow string.

Later that night when Suto cautiously slipped into the dark kitchen, he had the surprise of his life when the lights flashed on and a pair of handcuffs were clicked over his yellow wrists.

The Chocolate Cream Burglar

By ALFRED HOLLINGSWORTH

A MUGGY, drizzling night rain was falling in the streets of New York. The solitary man who had been loitering along Ninety-sixth street paused as he came to the space where the new building was under construction. He halted and carefully scrutinized the rear view of the Lotus Apartments, where he knew Grace Forsythe lived.

"Hell!" he remarked cheerfully. In the dim light he was certain that he saw a dark figure crouched on the fire-escape outside the windows of Grace's apartment, and that meant that some one had beat him to the job! With an impatient exclamation, he cautiously made his way to the foot of the fire-escape and, grasping the lower rounds, swung himself up the ladder.

Meanwhile the figure outside the window had succeeded in prying loose the catch and slipped into the room, dragging a heavy bag of tools with her. After pulling down the shades and drawing the heavy curtains, she flashed on the lights and stood revealed as a young girl, not more than eighteen, fair-haired and slight, with dark-brown eyes gleaming through the slits in a black mask.

The girl seemed quite at home in Grace Forsythe's rooms, and glanced around the denim-shrouded room as if she did not fear being disturbed. Evidently she knew that Grace had fled to Hopatcong to escape the sizzling pavements of New York, for she limped over to the table (she had bruised her knee on the fire-escape) with an air of feeling at ease in her surroundings. From the bag she took out an assortment of tools, a box of chocolates, and a bottle of colorless liquid. "I hope I don't have to use that," she muttered, as she placed it on the table beside the chocolates, pausing to turn over the visiting card on which she had written, "Compliments of the Chocolate Cream Burglar." The card was attached to the box with burnt orange ribbon.

Having set the stage, the girl took a screw-driver and, going over to a plaster-of-Paris bas-relief which adorned the wall, removing a couple of screws, she swung it back on a pair of hinges. A small wall safe was revealed. She regarded this safe very much as if it were some puzzle she was about to solve. After studying the dial with a perplexed frown, she began twirling the knob, calling out the combination as she did so.

"Six — nine — three — seven? Er — seven——" she doubtfully enumerated. "What comes after seven?"

"Eight!" answered a voice behind her, and the girl gave a startled gasp, sat down on the floor, and looked up into the face of a young man in evening dress and opera hat. At sight of the mask which he wore the girl started to scream.

"Never scream when you're cracking a safe!" the man warned in a pleasant voice.

"Wha—wha-at—do you want here?" demanded the girl breathlessly, scrambling to her feet. "How dare you intrude?"

"If I'm guilty of intrusion I but followed your example and came in by way of the fire-escape," the man explained in a conciliating manner. "You see, I've been planning this job for weeks—and so I feel that you are the intruder."

"Have you Grace's permission to be here—does she know that you're here?"

"I hope not—although I'd planned to let her know—later. In fact I've been waiting for Grace to get out of town."

"Then you know her?"

"Oh, everybody knows Grace Forsythe—and the Vallon necklace—and the careless manner in which she leaves it around. Why, only last month she took it off and left it lying on the table at Rector's!"

"Yes—isn't she the most careless creature? Well—I don't suppose I should tell you—but she's gone to Hopatcong and left it here in this safe—or at least I'm pretty sure she has—and so——"

"And so you're going to try to 'lift it,' is that the idea?"

"Why—I'm her friend."

"So am I. I'm always the friend of my clients—and I'm sure that Grace is to be one of my clients. I'm just like that chap who robs people and then leaves a box of chocolate creams with his compliments."

"Oh, you mean the 'Chocolate Cream Burglar?" the girl inquired, clasping her hands ecstatically. "Oh, isn't he just the love of a man! I'm just crazy about him. But you haven't told me about yourself. What are you doing here? Are you a burglar, too?"

"Obviously I must either be a burglar or"—and he paused and placed his finger derisively alongside his nose—"or a detective."

"Oh, not a detective!" cried the girl in fright.

"Very well—if you prefer it, I'll be a burglar! But since we are both here on the same errand, suppose we become pals, crack the safe and split the loot!"

"'Split the loot!' Oh, how I'd love to do that—but—but—I can't do it! My conscience won't let me!"

"Your conscience?"

"I couldn't—I wouldn't dare!"

"Huh!" snorted the man and, turning away from her, picked up the box of chocolates which the girl had placed on the table. "What's this? 'The

Chocolate Cream Burglar?'" He set down the box, and his lips formed the sound of a low whistle. He glanced at the girl as if he scarcely could believe his eyes. "Do you mean to tell me that you are the 'Chocolate Cream Burglar'—the notorious croo—er—the celebrated artist in crime, for whom the New York police have been searching for months?"

"I—I—er—am!" the girl admitted.

"Oh, then I do not wonder that you resented my intrusion! I never dreamed that I was butting in on an artist in crime!" He drew his heels together with military precision, raised his hat and made her a stiff little bow, bending from the waist. "However, now that I am here, permit me to ask you a great favor. May I remain and study your technique?"

"My—my—I beg pardon?"

"Your technique! You see, I am like the humble practitioner who unexpectedly secures the opportunity of watching a great specialist operating. I'm anxious to improve my art," he explained with insinuating candor, and the Artist in Crime was forced to smile at him in response to the perfectly adorable manner in which he had made his request. Never before had she realized what charming men her profession contained.

"You're very flattering, Mr.—er—Burglar—but, really—I don't feel that you'd gain very much from watching me operate on that safe."

"Ah—perhaps you feel that it is unworthy of your skill."

"Yes, it's such a little thing, you know. I'll probably not bother with it, just pour a little of this soup in it, and touch it off!" she remarked nonchalantly, as she picked up the bottle of colorless liquid and shook it violently. "Glycerine!" she explained.

"Glycerine? My Gawd! Not nitro?" cried the man, seizing her hand and gently removing the bottle from it. "Angels rush in where burglars fear to tread! Nitroglycerine! Good Lord!"

"I'm not sure whose make it is," she confessed. "I just asked for glycerine—I couldn't very well tell them what I wanted it for, could I?"

The man looked at her with a slow smile spreading over his face, and then he began to chuckle inwardly, his eyes crinkling up until they were surrounded by dozens of fine lines. Presently he burst into hearty but voiceless mirth, shaking from head to foot with spasms of enjoyment.

"I beg your pardon—for—for—smiling—but—ooooh——" and he went off into another paroxysm. "I beg your pardon, but I'm laughing at my own fright!" He looked at her with appraising eyes, which found her very good indeed. "So you're the Chocolate Cream Burglar?" he murmured, shaking his head incredulously. "Oh, come now—— Come, come! Tell me all about it—who are you, anyway?"

"I suppose it's useless my deceiving you any longer, so I'll tell you all about it. Why, I've got to get into the safe, and get possession of the Vallon necklace—and—and—everything."

But before she could do so the man made a sudden dive for the switch and turned off the lights, seized her by the arm and started forcing her toward the door of a closet. "Sssh!" he warned, as the sound of footsteps came from the hallway and a heavy hand tried the door. The man crowded into the closet close beside the girl and then knelt and placed his eye to the keyhole. The hall door opened and a little, weazened man in a check suit entered, followed by the burly form of a policeman!

"Come on in, Bull," invited the man in the check suit, using a slight Cockney accent. The big policeman followed him into the room, closing the door after him, and then the man in the check suit swept the room with a flashlight and uttered a quite indecent expression of profanity as he caught sight of the tools lying on the table. "Powder me pink!" he cried; "there's been some one erhead of us."

"Then they've beat it, when they heard us comin'," answered the officer in an adenoid growl. "They ain't opened the safe yet!"

"Bli-me! I believe you're right. Turn on the lights till we tyke a look at things." A swift inspection seemed to satisfy the little man. "I'll wyger the necklace's still in there!" he declared. "You beat it outside, Bull, and see that I'm not interrupted. This job won't take me a mo!"

"All right, Dinky," answered the officer.

Dinky closed the door after him and then removed his coat and prepared to get to work, but first he took a small box from his pocket and with a sly grin started over to the table and was about to set it down when he paused, open-mouthed, and gazed at the box of chocolates already there.

"Well! Powder me pink!" he gasped, looking as if he had seen a ghost. "Powder me pink!"

"Competition's fierce, isn't it?" queried the man, stepping from the closet, automatic in hand.

Dinky's nervous system went to pieces and he threw up his hands and cowered in complete surrender. "Don't shoot!" he whimpered. "I'll come along peaceable!"

"Put down your hands, Dinky," ordered the man. "I'm not making any arrests to-night."

Dinky regarded him with curious eyes, evidently puzzled by the mask which the man still wore. "Who the 'ell are you, anyway?" His truculence was returning, now that he saw he was in no immediate danger. The man did not answer, but taking the box of candy from Dinky's hand, read aloud a little card attached to it, "Compliments of the Chocolate Cream Burglar!"

"So that's who you are?" He regarded Dinky with steady disapproval. "That's who you are, eh, the Chocolate Cream Burglar? Well, you're the third one that's been here to-night."

"Suppose I am, eh—wot's that to you? And that ayn't tellin' me who you are. You look and

act like a toff—but wot are you doin' with that mask on, if you're not one of us?"

"Of course I'm one of you. I've been planning this job for weeks, and now you've got to come in and spoil everything!"

"Then wot sye you and me go pals—put through the job and divvy the swag, pleasant-like and agreeable?"

"My conscience wouldn't permit," objected the man with a grin.

"You're a rum un," laughed Dinky. "Is it a go?"

"All right, let's get busy at once. Here's plenty of 'soup' that the fellow ahead us has left—enough to wreck the whole block." He picked up the bottle of glycerine and shook it seductively.

"'Soup?' For Gawd's sake put it down—or you'll blow us all to 'ell! You just leave this job to me—I'll show you how to go about it."

But Dinky's confidence began to ooze presently after all his efforts to open the safe by feeling out the combination had failed, and it was not until the man joined him and had worked over it for quite a while that the door suddenly swung open under his hand, and they began to rummage through the interior of the safe.

"There she is!"

The man brought out a satin-lined case, from which he drew forth the glittering loop of the Vallon necklace and held it up, sparkling in the light. "Oh, you beauties, you dream!" breathed the man, caressing the jewels with all the love of a connoisseur, thrusting aside the outstretched paws of Dinky, who greedily reached for the glittering bauble.

"Ayn't you goin' to let me see it?" he snarled.

The man paid no attention to the question, but Dinky did not intend being ignored. "'Ere, hand it over—and be quick about it!" The demand came in a growl, and the man felt a revolver thrust into his stomach, while Dinky's hand clutched again for the necklace. For a second the man hesitated, and then, with a curse and a laugh, flung the necklace to the floor.

"Take it, you swine!"

Dinky's fingers closed on it. As he arose he found himself gazing into the automatic held in the girl's hand, and heard the warning voice of the man behind him: "Don't move, Dinky, I've got you covered, too!"

"Where th' bloomin' 'ell do you all come from?" demanded Dinky, gazing from one to the other and then giving vent to anger in a snarl of sarcasm. "You're a couple of blawsted crooks—that's what you are!" he cried in bitter resentment.

"Righto!" laughed the man, as if he enjoyed the situation. "Hand over the necklace, Dinky."

The little fellow seemed about to obey, but suddenly he lowered his bullet head and buried it in the pit of the man's stomach, knocking the breath out of him and overturning him; then he dived for the light switch and the room was in total darkness, while the girl was still wondering what it all meant. She heard the sound of rushing footsteps, the colliding of two bodies against the door, saw a sudden spurt of flame as a revolver barked, then came the quick-drawn gasps of fighting, struggling men, a squeal of pain. The hall door opened and the battling men were dimly outlined for a second; then the door slammed, a key grated in the lock and nothing came to her but the deep-labored breathing of one man.

Breathlessly the girl waited for something which would tell her the outcome of the struggle, but no sound came to her excepting the stertorous breathing. Which one had been victor in the struggle, who was in the room with her, she did not know. She feared to speak lest she should betray her position and invite attack. With finger on her automatic, she glided along the floor, shifting her position, and speaking as she moved. "Who's hurt?" she whispered, unable longer to stand the strain of the uncertainty.

"No one," came back the answer in a gasp of pain which seemed to belie the words, but the voice was so choked, strained with difficult breathing, that she could not decide to whom it belonged. The uncertainty was becoming unbearable; she decided to take a chance, and suddenly swept the room with her flash-light, picking up the figure of the man where he leaned against the door, evidently in great pain, breathing in short gasps—but the Vallon necklace was hanging from his fingers!

"Oh, you're hurt!"

Her sympathy was instant and sincere, but the man brushed it aside. "He kicked the wind out of me, that's all—a dirty trick he learned in Paris," he gasped. "Be all right—in—minute. Hurts like hell, though! Saved—the necklace!" He held it up triumphantly, and tried to laugh, but the laughter turned into a gurgle of pain.

"Yes, yes! That was so good of you—thank you so much for saving it for me."

She held out her hand as if she expected him to place the Vallon necklace in it, make her a present of it! The man blinked his eyes a couple of times. "I am to hand over the Vallon necklace to you?" he inquired. "But—I thought we were to be pals—to split the loot—to divvy."

"How can I divvy when it isn't mine to divvy?"

"Very easily! Here, I cut the string—and half the diamonds are mine and half yours!"

"But don't you understand that they belong to Grace—that she forgot and left them here in her safe—and Bobby Vallon, who gave them to her, has quarreled with her, and is trying to get them away from her, and Grace sent me into town to get them, and pretend that the Chocolate Cream Burglar had stolen them, and then Bobby couldn't trace them; and I simply can't go back to Hopatcong and tell Grace that I stood by and let a common burglar divvy the necklace with me, when the whole thing belonged to me—belongs to Grace—belongs to——"

"Belongs to Bobby Vallon!" suggested the man, "and I think I'd better turn it over to him!"

"Don't you dare! You'll give it all to me, if—if—you're a gentleman!"

"But I've never claimed to be a gentleman! I've never found it worth while—and certainly the Vallon necklace is too big a price to pay for the privilege."

"Oh, I'm disappointed in you! Even though you are a burglar, I thought maybe you might be a gentleman! But now it seems that you're nothing but a common ordinary thief, a creature who stoops to stealing necklaces from women!"

"And what are you?"

Her words had angered him, a dark flush mounted under his skin, his eyes became hard and a stern look came into his jaw.

"I'm a lady!"

"I'm not so sure about that! You're a clever little baggage—maybe you're fooling me all the time. I'll just take you to headquarters and make you prove your story!"

"Headquarters? You don't mean that you're—you're a detective?"

"Why not?"

"But I thought you were a burglar!"

"It seems, then, that I fooled you, just as you fooled me! The only way to get things straightened out is to take you to headquarters and let you prove who you are!"

"But don't you see that I can't go there and have Bobby Vallon and everybody know that I tried to steal the necklace?"

"That's the only solution I see. As an officer, I can't conscientiously turn over the Vallon necklace to you. Now, if you were a crook and I were a crook, we could split the necklace between us and no one need be the wiser. Don't you wish that you were a crook?"

"Oh, but I'm not!"

"I'm not so sure about that! You have all the qualifications for a high-class crook!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"A successful crook must never look like a crook—and that's where you've got it on them, for no one would suspect what a cunning, unscrupulous creature you are! At first I thought you were kidding when you told me that you were the Chocolate Cream Burglar, but now I see how clever you were, first attracting suspicion to yourself and then allaying it. Ah, but you're a sly one!"

"Oh! I'm not a sly one—there's nothing sly about me!"

"It'll be some feather in my cap to run you in, to have it said that plain Detective Samuel Pelton captured the notorious Chocolate Cream Burglar, unmasked her, and arrested her single-handed!"

"But I'm not the Chocolate Cream Burglar!"

"Tell that to the desk sergeant!" he jeered brutally, seizing her by the wrist and dragging her toward the door. As he fumbled with the key there came a sound from the other side the door, the knob rattled under a strong hand, and then a hoarse, adenoid voice demanded admittance.

"The police!" whispered the man, pushing the girl into the closet and thrusting the necklace into her hands. "Get in there, and keep quiet!" he warned. "Hide the necklace!"

He closed the door on her and advanced toward the hall door, but a noise caused him to turn and face Dinky, who had come up the fire-escape and now confronted him with drawn revolver.

"H'elevate your dukes, you blawsted toff!" ordered Dinky, and the man obeyed him, while Dinky, still keeping him covered, edged around to the hall door, turned the key and admitted Bull. "Come in. Bull—officer! Naow then, hand over that necklace! Don't keep me waitin'—hand it over!"

"I haven't it, old dear," answered the man calmly, "and I don't intend standing here with my hands in the air like a moving picture hold-up." He shrugged his shoulders and started to lower his hands, but Dinky ordered him to keep them up.

"Frisk him, Bull."

Bull searched hurriedly but thoroughly, removed the man's automatic, but failed to find the necklace. "He ain't got it on him, that's sure," Bull declared.

"Then the dame has it. Where is she?" Dinky glanced suspiciously around the room until the door of the closet caught his eyes. "I'll bet she's in there!" Seizing the door, he yanked it open, pulling out the girl, who was desperately clinging to the other side of the knob with one hand, while with the other hand she was hopelessly trying to thrust the necklace out of sight in the bosom of her dress.

"Ow—powder me pink, but I'm glad to see you again," chuckled Dinky at sight of her. "Tryin' to make away with my family jewels, eh? Hand over the bloomin' little sparklers!" he invited, following the retreating girl who shrank from his extended hand and endeavored to thrust the jewels out of sight, but they had caught in a button of her dress and refused to disappear into their hiding place.

"They're mine! I'll not give them up!" defied the girl.

"Then I'll go after them myself," Dinky warned, seizing her roughly. "Keep the bloke covered, Bull, and if he makes a move let him have it," as the man made a movement to aid the girl. Slowly the man retreated to the table, stepping backward with a cringing air, keeping his gaze fixed on the menacing guns of Dinky and Bull.

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way about it," he acquiesced, with a deprecatory air that made the girl's lips curl with scorn. "I suppose it's none of my funeral."

"I didn't think you'd want to interfere," chuckled Dinky, with a contemptuous glance at

the man. "Put the darbies on him, Bull—while I attend to the dame!"

The officer produced a pair of handcuffs, slipping his revolver into his pocket as he did so, and advancing on the man.

"Don't make another move, or I'll blow you to hell!" suddenly yelled the man, seizing the bottle from the table and holding it aloft. The officer paused, and then, sensing some menace from the uplifted bottle, he ordered the man to "drop that!"

"It's nitro!" warned Dinky.

"My Gawd!" yelled the officer, turning an apoplectic purple and throwing up his hands as if to ward off the deadly explosive, "don't drop it!"

"Hand over your guns—take them, miss," ordered the man. She obeyed, passing the guns over to him. After he had extracted the shells he tossed aside all excepting his own and hers, then, approaching Bull, he tweaked off the false mustache which adorned that worthy's face. "That's a very fair make-up for the movies, Bull, but your shield is old issue, and your mustache wasn't stuck tight around the edges."

"Say, who the devil are you, anyway?" demanded Bull.

"You'll all learn that when you get to headquarters!"

"Well—powder me pink," moaned Dinky, "who ever saw a fly-cop made up as a burglar?"

Without ceremony the man hustled Dinky and Bull into the closet. "Just wait in there till the wagon comes—and to keep you amused I'll tell you a little joke. That bottle contained nothing but drug store glycerine!" Slamming the door on them, he left them to laugh over the joke, and went over to the phone, called up Spring 3600 and ordered the patrol wagon sent up for the two burglars.

"The police will be here in a few minutes," he announced to the girl calmly. "I'll have to take you and the necklace to headquarters!"

"Must I be arrested? Is there no way out?"

"I offered to divvy with you on that necklace when you thought that I was a burglar. Suppose I made you the same offer now—and let you escape? No one need be the wiser."

"Except ourselves—and Grace! No, I'll not fail her!"

"You'd go to jail for the sake of keeping your promise of making good with your friends?"

"For the sake of being true to my promise, yes!"

"Hum! You seem to be a worth-while kind of friend—and they're scarce! All right—you can keep the necklace!"

"Keep the necklace—and I may go?"

"Better go while the going's good—and here, take this; I'll not need it to-night!"

He handed her a small parcel. Footsteps sounded on the stairs.

"Better follow me down the fire-escape," he suggested, as he darted through the window. "And thank you for a pleasant evening!"

He disappeared.

The girl glanced at the parcel he had handed her. It was a box of Gowney's, and on the attached card she read, "Compliments of the Chocolate Cream Burglar."

She followed him down the fire-escape as the police began hammering at the door.

SHOE BUCKLE LORE

BUCKLES and history have been made together, and the fair collector of boot decorations may become a well-informed historian while seeking the buckle of proper size and style to suit her whim.

The original buckle was nothing more than an ancient ring brooch devised to fasten at the side. In medieval times they were used, richly ornamented, to secure the trappings of horses as well as the garments of man. About the year 1350 they were first introduced into general use for boots, merely serving their purpose as fasteners without any particular decorative charm.

Plaited silk rosettes became a caprice of dress during the reign of Charles II, and then developed suddenly into small round buckles, followed by conservative square ones of brass and steel until the early seventeenth century.

The pinnacle of fashionable bootery while William II held court was reached by increasing the size of one's buckles on each new pair of red-heeled shoes or square-toed clogs.

Much individual care was expended on designs created for special stones. Gold, silver, gilt and solid silver incrusted with rose-cut diamonds and other brilliants brought the trade to an estimate of 20,000 hands in England at the end of the seventeenth century, and it proved almost a national calamity when, despite the sympathy of the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York and various nobles, the mode changed, forcing employees out of work.

In the early eighteenth century the Court of St. Germain restored the buckle to prominence by designing a pair for 200,000 livre, which the king duplicated. Then came a golden age of French buckles which rivaled all preceding years. Infinite pains were taken to procure originality in materials and workmanship. Paste diamonds in gold foundations were for a while considered smart, until succeeded by mother-of-pearl disks on brass grounds, sparkling faceted steel, sapphire paste, pinchbeck, jet, blue glass and scrolled tin.

When French finances were lowered, due to new republic conditions, luxuries such as buckles of valuable metals were sacrificed in the melting pot.

Playing Detective

By TOM FOX,

THERE was more indignation than surprise over the murder of Billy Harte. For Billy was the gambler of Coffeedom, and carried his life with his cards.

But he was of considerable squareness, and nobody said that he had ever killed a man in cold blood, wherefore when Dick Armstrong shot him down, and "skipped" the town, a dozen of Billy's friends insisted that I should try my skill as a detective.

I had never been honored with a sight of Dick Armstrong, but I thought I should know him from the minute description furnished, and my first move was after the telegraph wires.

But the ticket office of the Clarkton Railroad was right on my way, and I stepped in to study the young man who operated it, and to ask him who had bought tickets there between eight and nine o'clock of the night before. He didn't know. Then I studied him closer, for what he said, and the way he said it, was interesting.

"Only three men took the train here, and one was Dick Armstrong," I said significantly.

Well, the young man believed it was so, now that I had mentioned it.

I was already satisfied that the young man needed attention, but I did not pretend to give him any just then. Yet I altered my whole plan of troubling the telegraph company when I found that the reticent ticket agent had just come from Lynchboard, forty miles to the north, that his name was Jack Reed, and that nobody could vouch for him.

I took the morning train for Lynchboard on the theory that Jack Reed and Dick Armstrong knew one another better than people suspected.

I got there by ten, and wrote the following letter for the two o'clock train back:

"Jack Reed:—I'm at the Haggerty House, Room '50.' I've got a 'pard' to write this. Send me the news. Dick Armstrong."

I registered at the Haggerty House as Dick Armstrong, and took Room "50."

I could find out nothing about Dick Armstrong at Lynchboard, but I did learn that he used to tarry there, off and on, and that Jack Reed was known as a chum of his.

I waited until the young man could answer my letter, and then telegraphed the constable at Coffeedom to arrest him.

The mail came, but there was no letter for Room "50," and my first move had been checkmated.

By this time Jack Reed would have been arrested by my orders, and without a particle of direct evidence against him.

It was perhaps eleven o'clock when there came a knock at the door, and the hotel clerk inquired if I could share my bed with a gentleman, as the house was full.

Before I could answer, I had caught sight of the "gentleman's" face, and it was—I felt certain—nobody else than Dick Armstrong.

I answered as indifferently as possible that I should be glad to oblige him, and without further parley the murderer of Billy Harte came into the room.

He was a tall, spare man, of quick nervous movements.

Suddenly throwing his coat on one side he pulled a revolver from his pistol pocket and glared at me.

"This ain't your quarrel, stranger."

To say that I was surprised wouldn't express it, and I don't think any other word quite would.

But we shall agree that I was wide awake, and I knew it was no use to play innocent, so lifting my head on my hand, and feeling the need of looking bolder than I felt, I coolly said:

"Not a bit of it."

"Well, I know you, and all about you," Dick Armstrong continued. "You wrote Jack Reed, only he wasn't bit, and his answer found me, and not you. But he told me where I could come across you."

"Dick Armstrong," I slowly answered, "haven't you had blood enough?"

"Not if I want more," he hissed.

"Dick Armstrong, you killed Billy Harte and I'm after you. If I could make it without giving up my own life I should be glad to accommodate all parties, but I'm not quite ready to do more—you understand?"

"Perhaps," he leered, "you're a little timid."

There was a taunt in the words that struck me harder than a blow.

My right hand grasped my pistol, while my other hand snatched up the pillow before me; that same instant a pistol shot rang out.

But somebody else had fallen, and no bullet had reached me.

I dropped pistol and pillow in amazement as the door was broken in and the brother of Billy Harte sprang into the room.

"Good for you," he cried to me, "and just in time," as he scowled down at the gasping form of Armstrong.

"We got your letter to Jack Reed when we bagged him, and off I sped to see Dick Armstrong at Room '50,' and I might have peppered you, old boy, in your bed if I had not sighted the genuine Dick over the open transom."

And he laughed in a way that redounded to his honor in Lynchboard, but might, before the corpse of Dick Armstrong, have curdled the blood of quieter men.

The Meaning Of Dreams

INCANTATIONS, CHARMS AND SPELLS

(*Continued from No. 76*)

Love Letters

On receiving a love letter that has any particular declaration in it, lay it wide open; then fold it in nine folds, pin it next to your heart, and then wear it till bedtime; then place it in your left hand glove, and lay it under your head. If you dream of gold, diamonds, or any other costly gem, your lover is true, and means what he says; if of white linen, you will lose him by death; and if of flowers, he will prove false. If you dream of his saluting you, he is at present false, and means not what he professes, but only to draw you into a snare.

To know if Woman with Child will have Girl or Boy

Write the proper names of the father and the mother, and of the month she conceived with child, and likewise adding all the numbers of those letters together, divide them by seven; and then if the remainder be even, it will be a girl; if uneven, it will be a boy.

To know if a Child new-born shall live or not

Write the proper names of the father and mother, and of the day the child was born, and put to each letter its number, as you did before, and unto the total sum, being collected together, put twenty-five, and then divide the whole by seven; and then, if it be even, the child shall die; but if it be uneven, the child shall live.

To know if any one shall enjoy their love or not

Take the number of the first letter of your name, the number of the planet, and the day of the week; put all these together, and divide them by thirty; if it be above, it will come to your mind, and if below, to the contrary; and mind that number which exceeds not thirty.

To find out the two first letters of a future Wife's or Husband's Name

Take a small Bible and the key of your front street-door, and having opened to Solomon's Songs, chap. viii. ver. 6 and 7, place the wards of the key on those two verses, and let the bow of the key be about an inch out of the top of the Bible; then shut the book, and tie it round with your garter, so as the key will not move, and the person who wishes to know his or her future husband or wife's signature, must suspend the Bible, by putting the middle finger of the right hand under the bow of the key, and the other person in like manner on the other side of the bow of the key, who must repeat the following verses, after the other person's saying the alphabet, one letter to each time repeating them. It must be observed that you mention to the person who repeats the verses, before you begin, which you intend to try first, whether surname or Christian name; and take care to hold the Bible steady, and when you arrive at the appointed letter the book will turn round under your finger, and that you will find to be the first of your intended's name.

(Solomon's Songs, chap. viii ver. 6 and 7.)

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned."

To know how soon a person will be Married

Get a green pea-pod, in which are exactly nine peas, hang it over the door, and then take notice of the next person who comes in, who is not of the family, and if it proves a bachelor you will certainly be married within that year.

On any Friday throughout the year—Take rosemary flowers, bay leaves, thyme, and sweet marjoram, of each a handful; dry these, and make them into a fine powder; then take a teaspoonful each sort, mix the powders together; then take twice the quantity of barley flour, and make the whole into cake with the milk of a red cow. This cake is not to be baked, but wrapped in clean writing-paper, and laid under your head any Friday night. If the person dreams of music, she will wed those she desires, and that shortly; if of fire, she will be crossed in love; if of a church, she will die single. If anything is written, or the least spot of ink is on the paper, it will not do.

To know what Fortune your Future Husband will be

Take a walnut, a hazle-nut and nutmeg; grate them together and mix them with butter and sugar, and make them up into small pills, of which nine must be taken on going to bed; and according to her dreams, so will be the state of the person she will marry. If a gentleman, of riches; if a clergyman, of white linen; if a lawyer, of darkness; if a tradesman, of odd noises and tumults; if a soldier or sailor, of thunder and lightning; if a servant, of rain.

(To be continued.)

Current News

CHECK BLOWN ACROSS SIX COUNTIES

Following a recent severe windstorm Anthony Gase, a farmer living near Fostoria, O., found in a field a check that had been blown across parts of six counties, from Greenville, O. The counties were Darke, Shelby, Auglaize, Allen, Hardin, Hancock and Seneca. He returned it to the Greenville Bank and received a letter of thanks.

WORLD'S BIGGEST CATARACT

Niagara Falls is not the greatest cataract in the world. The greatest cataract is said to be on the Ignazu River, which partly separates Brazil and Argentina.

The precipice over which the river plunges is 210 feet high, that of Niagara being 167 feet. The cataract is 13,123 feet wide, or about two and a half times as wide as Niagara.

It is estimated that 100,000,000 tons of water pass over Niagara in one hour. A like estimate gives the falls of Ignazu 140,000,000 tons.

HEARTWOOD AND SAPWOOD ALIKE

Thousands of tests have been made at the Forestry Product Laboratory for the purpose of determining any differences which may exist between heartwood and sapwood. No difference in the mechanical properties of the samples has been found. In other mechanical properties, there are differences between heartwood and sapwood which have an important bearing on their use for various purposes. The sapwood of most American species is considerably less resistant to decay than the heartwood, and where the wood is used without preservation treatment in situations which favor decay, the sapwood is likely to have a much shorter life. In these particular cases, therefore, strength requirements may have an indirect bearing on the choice between heartwood and sapwood, inasmuch as wood infected with decay is likely to have its strength properties, particularly that of shock resistance, greatly reduced.

ONE THOUSAND YEARS OLD

Hundreds of Hindus believe that Rishis and Sadhus, 1,000 years or more old, are still alive, but that they do not care to appear before the public. They are living in some Himalayan caves practicing yoga, according to the stories that are told. Whether a 1,000-year-old Sadhu has really been seen by anybody there is no record, but many people will tell you that Sadhus 300 years old or more are still to be seen.

Baba Thakurdassji is a renowned Sadhu. He has many thousands of disciples, among whom several are Europeans. His disciples assert he is more than 300 years old, but he does not appear to be over 60. He is a power in India.

A Sadhu of greater repute is Baba Satchitananda Bharati. He is the Guru of the Nepal rajahs. He remembered the famous battle of Panipat, which took place in 1526 A. D. He has also met Gauranga, the famous preacher of "Bhakti" (religion of spiritual love); Shinaji, the founder of the Mahratta power, and other distinguished Indians. He has thousands of disciples in different parts of India. Questioned as to how he attained such an age, he has said that moderation in diet, regular habits and practice of "pranayam" are the secrets of long life.

A MOST BEAUTIFUL VOLUME

The most beautiful volume among the five hundred thousand in the Congressional Library at Washington is a Bible which was transcribed by a monk in the sixteenth century. It could not be matched to-day in the best printing office in the world. The parchment is is perfect preservation. Every one of its thousand pages is a study. The general lettering is in German text, each letter perfect in coal black ink; without a scratch or blot from lid to lid. At the beginning of each chapter the first letter is very large, usually two or three inches long, and is brightly illuminated in red and blue ink. Within each of these capitals is drawn the figure of some saint, or some incident of which the chapter tells illustrated. There are two columns on a page, and nowhere is traceable the slightest irregularity of line, space or formation of the letters. Even under a magnifying glass they seem flawless.

This precious volume is kept under a glass case, which is sometimes lifted to show that all the pages are as perfect as those which lie open. A legend relates that a young man who had sinned deeply became a monk and resolved to do penance for his misdeeds. He determined to copy the Bible, that he might learn every letter of the divine commands which he had violated. Every day for many years he patiently pursued his task. Each letter was wrought in reverence and love, and the patient soul found its only companionship in the saintly faces which were portrayed on these pages.

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GAVE UP PROPERTY AT "SPIRITS" CALL

Making the astonishing charge that through spiritualistic messages, alleged to come from the late Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, he was induced to turn over $62,000 to Mrs. Mabelle Rawson Hirons, Dr. James B. Hubbell has instituted legal action for the return of his property. The plaintiff was secretary to Miss Barton for thirty years, and the defendant his life-long friend.

In his bill of complaint, filed in the Montgomery Court, at Rockville, Md., Dr. Hubbell asserts that, when Miss Barton died in 1912, he owned real estate valued at $50,000, costly household furniture and a claim for $5,000 against the town of Glen Echo, as well as other property. It was his cherished hope, he said, to establish a memorial for Miss Barton.

Mrs. Hirons, the plaintiff alleges, visited him in May, 1914, and expressed great interest in his project. On this occasion, Dr. Hubbell states, the defendant simulated a trance, during which she pretended to be in communication with the spirit of the deceased founder of the Red Cross.

According to the complaint, Mrs. Hirons alleged that Miss Barton directed her to tell Dr. Hubbell she (the defendant) had come to help carry out his plan, and that she should turn over all his property to her.

Dr. Hubbell, the petition states, was much affected, and, believing that it was possible for departed spirits to communicate with their earthly friends through certain persons known as mediums, conveyed the real estate to Mr. Hirons, together with $4,500 he had received under Miss Barton's will, $2,000 he borrowed from relatives, and $4,100 in Glen Echo bonds, all of which were to be used in furtherance of the memorial.

GOLDFISH RAISED BY ACRES

Fish farming is more profitable than cattle raising, in the opinion of Eugene Catte, of Langdon, Kan.. He has ten acres of ponds given over to the raising of the shiny little parlor fish. Millions of goldfish have been reared by Catte since he started in the business years ago, but the demand for goldfish continues to grow. That fish farming is a paying business when conducted on a wholesale scale is evidenced by the fact that this Kansas farmer has been able to make as much money from his ten acres of goldfish ponds as other farmers from their one hundred-and-sixty-acre farms. In fact, the industry has grown to such proportions that Catte has turned his big grain farm over to his son in order that he himself may devote all of his time to the raising of goldfish.

Years ago Catte started a private fish hatchery on a homestead he had taken up near the foot of the sand hills. He was able to convert some bogs and a spring into a fish pond, says the Popular Science Monthly, where he began raising fish for the market. There soon sprang up such a demand for small fish, however, that Catte found it more paying to turn his attention to goldfish. Now his business has grown to such an extent that his hatchery covers thirteen acres and is composed of fifteen ponds, ten of which are devoted to goldfish.

Catte's busy season begins in the autumn. Most of his time is spent in wading about in high rubber boots, sorting out the marketable fish with his bare hands. This is no lazy man's job. Goldfish farming consists in something more than reading the newspaper on the back porch, waiting for the fish to grow.

TOO MANY BULLS IN THE SEAL HERD

The endeavor to preserve the fur seal stands one of the best phases of recent enlightenment in the human treatment of animal life and a complement to the senseless slaughter of the fur seal which dates during recent years. That the case is not so simple a matter as merely stopping the killing is the thesis advanced by Dr. David Starr Jordan, who writes:

In an interesting and suggestive article on the "Rescued Fur Seal Industry" in Science, Mr. W. T. Hornaday states that "man's so-called management (of the herd) lies solely in the use of the seal killer's club and the skinning knife." This is not quite the whole truth, for while the behavior of individual animals in feeding, breeding or migration is beyond human control, man can do something to increase the numbers. In the '90s most of the young seals lying on sandy "rookeries" were killed by the hookworm (Uncinaria lucasi). Those on the rocks were virtually immune and as the shrinkage of the herd before its rescue took them practically all off the sands, no "wormy pups" are lately reported. In 1897 the commission of that year gathered up—and mostly burned—12,000 "pups" that had been weakened by the hookworm and then trampled by the bulls. In that year we had several sandy patches in Zapadni rookery covered by rocks, and we suggested fencing the animals away from the great sand flat of Tolstoi. To cover or fence up sandy areas is a possible factor of "management."

Another is the extirpation of the "idle bulls" which surround the rookeries and raid the harems, killing many females and young. Ninety per cent. or more of the males of this polygamous species are wholly superfluous. In the recent absurdly needless "five years closed season" these have accumulated to the danger point. I am told that an order has now been given for the shooting of 7,000 of them.

The projection of the females from killing on land and sea may be also regarded as a phase of "management."

Whether other islands could be stocked from the Pribyloffs has never been tested. On these islands there is ample breeding space for millions more, and there is no food shortage outside.

HISTORY OF THE PUMPKIN

The term pumpkin, a corruption of pompion, is very loosely applied in this country. In some sections it is used to include the squashes, members of another species.

The pumpkin is an annual, belonging to the gourd family. It is a vigorous, prostrate plant, running twelve feet or more, with a hairy, almost prickling stem. It bears large, bell-shaped yellow flowers, five cleft, the base adherent to the calyx tube, with three long, much curved anthers, which unite into a small head, and three stigmas. The fruit is fleshy, with a firm rind, and is nearly round. The outer surface is ribbed or furrowed, the internal portion mellow and crossed by pulpy threads. The average size of the fruit is about one foot in diameter, though it is often much larger; its color is of a clear, orange yellow.

Pumpkins are largely cultivated both in Europe and our country, playing an important part during the Thanksgiving festivities when made into pies.

As ordinarily grown the seeds are planted in fields of corn and potatoes and the plants left to take care of themselves, yet even with this neglectful cultivation it often yields as much as a ton of the fruit per acre without apparent detriment to the yield of corn or potatoes in the same field.

The native country of the pumpkin is disputed, but there is good reason to believe that it is indigenous to America. The common field pumpkin was much used for food in New England before the introduction of improved varieties or of the more edible squashes, being made into pies, cooked as squashes are now cooked, or baked, the seeds and stringy matter having been removed. For winter use it was cut into strips and dried in the sun or in a warm room. At present it is mainly used to feed farm animals, which eat it with avidity, though the seeds, being dioretic in their action, need first to be removed. This variety is of a rich orange yellow color, shaped round with flattened ends, averaging about fourteen inches long by twelve inches wide. The flesh is yellow, generally coarse grained and often stringy, yet still esteemed by many above the improved varieties for making the favorite pumpkin pie.

Of all varieties the Canada and Vermont pumpkin is one of the best for animal food and of excellent quality for the table. It is of large size, oblate in form, with deep ribs and a deep orange yellow color. The flesh is much sweeter and less stringy than the common pumpkin.

The cheese pumpkin is a remarkably vigorous and productive plant, the fruit large, much flattened and deeply ribbed. Its color is a reddish orange. The flesh is sweet and well flavored.

There are several other varieties, the best of which for culinary purposes is the sugar pumpkin. This pumpkin is small, being eight or nine inches broad and six deep, but is an abundant bearer of excellent quality, being unsurpassed for pies and superior to most squashes for table use.

If the grower desires very large pumpkins for exhibition purposes, all pumpkins except one or two should be removed from the vine.

MASSACHUSETTS' HISTORIC TREES

The part that trees play in the history of a State is shown by an index table of historic trees now standing in Massachusetts. The table, which was prepared for the New England Historic Genealogical Society, shows the association of trees with historic events extending through important periods since the days of the Pilgrim Fathers.

The most famous is the Washington Elm, in Cambridge, under which General Washington took command of the little force of patriots that was called the American Army. It has been said that the troops could almost be sheltered under the elm's 85-feet spread of branches.

Other trees mark revolutionary incidents and events, with local, State or national significance, as the places where Washington rested or made an address, or watered his horses; where Lafayette stopped during his campaign in the patriot cause; where revolutionists had their rendezvous; where the Minute Men trained or took stand in actions against the British.

The Boxford Elm, a revolutionary meeting place, was the scene also of the signing of an important treaty in the days of the Indian wars, and under the Eliot Oak at South Natick John Eliot spread his gospel to the Indians. Famous speeches on abolition by the orators of the time were made among the trees at Island Grove in North Abington during the Civil War.

A buttonwood tree at Charlemont, with a spread of 85 feet, is preserved as the place where the first settlers found shelter while they slept, and the Sheffield Elm was the camping place of the founder of that town and the scene of the town meetings, long afterward. The Paxton Elm marks the center of the State.

The Oakham Oak gave that town its name, and was a model for its town seal, and the Avery Oak at Dedham, also the model for the town seal, served as the site of the town's first religious meeting.

The oldest tree in the index is the Endicott Pear Tree at Danversport, planted by John Endicott in 1630. The greatest is the Rugg Elm at Framingham, with a spread of 145 feet. The famous "Great Elm" of Boston's earliest days is no more, but an offshoot is recognized as Old Elm's Descendant. The Ancient Oaks, made famous in Longfellows' "Tales of a Wayside Inn"; Hawthorne's Grove at Concord, favorite walk of the author; Louisa May Alcott's Elms, also at Concord, and Oliver Wendell Holmes's Pine at Pittsfield, are all treasured for the associations with those who named them.

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By chemical treatment sawdust may be converted into a nourishing cattle food. This fact was brought out at the sectional meeting of Industrial and Engineering Chemists, American Chemical Society, at the University of Chicago.

The process of preparing such animal food was described by E. C. Sherrard and G. W. Blanco. White sawdust, finely ground, is treated with diluted sulphuric acid under steam pressure. This breaks up the fiber and extracts the sugar. The acid is neutralized by adding lime. The liquid thus obtained, when boiled down, is rich in sugar, and when mixed with the fiber produces a moist feed containing about 15 per cent of water, in which form it is fed to dairy cows.

At the Forest Products Laboratory, United States Department of Agriculture, Madison, Wis., experiments are said to have proved that cows thrived on this sawdust ration, and not only gave more milk but increased in weight.

NEVER WEAR RINGS NEAR MACHINERY

Most people would imagine that the condemnation of harmful luxuries would happen most frequently in the office with rich patients, but surgeons attached to large industries could tell that neither fines nor thought of others seems able to eradicate the love of finery, says the New York Medical Journal. Three cases of finger or hand crushing have happened recently in laundries owing to rings being worn. The law decrees that all flatiron workers must be equipped with guards in front of the feed rolls to prevent the hands of feeders from being into the rollers, and ringed fingers were found especially dangerous, yet nothing seems able to instill the idea of self-preservation at the small cost of giving up some finery in work hours.

It is not only the girls but the men who sometimes put adornment before safety. Do they realize—just to give one instance—that the rim of a circular saw is moving at the rate of one to two miles a minute? Perhaps not, but the printed warnings against wearing rings or gloves are before their eyes. All the same smashed fingers and hands appear with horrible frequency.

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